The Prohibition of Studying Works on Speculative Theology *(Kalam)*

A treatise including a refutation of
Abu al-Wafa ‘Ali b. ‘Aqil al-Hanbali

By al-Imam Muwaffaq al-Din Ibn Qudama al-Maqdisi
(d. 620/1223)

Preface

Indeed, all praise is due to Allah who continues to bestow His endless favours upon His creation, religious guidance being the most precious of them. May Allah's peace and blessings be upon the noblest of Messengers, Muhammad, and all those adhered to his path, until the Day of Resurrection.

This small treatise is amongst the many works of the renowned Hanbali jurist, Muwaffaq al-Din Ibn Qudama al-Maqdisi (d. 620/1223), in defence of the traditional Islamic doctrines, and censure of speculative theology known as *'ilm al-kalam*.[1] This particular treatise comes as a violent attack on one of the prominent members of his own school, Abu al-Wafa 'Ali b. 'Aqil (d. 513/1119), who was heavily influenced by the rationalist movement in his formulative years.

Background:

Ibn 'Aqil was one of the most notable, intelligent and eloquent Hanbalis of his time. However, in his early days, he was censured by his fellow Hanbalis for attending lessons with Ibn al-Walid and Ibn al-Tabban, the two renowned Mu'tazili Shaykhs. Ibn Rajab asserts that Ibn 'Aqil would study *kalam* with them in secret; that often there would appear from him signs of heresies, some of which remained with him until he died, despite of his sincere repentance.

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[1] *'Ilm al-Kalam* refers to the speculative theological approach to God, where God's existence is affirmed by reason alone. *'Ilm* refers to 'science', whereas *Kalam* refers to 'Speech'. There is a great dispute over the reason for naming this science, *'ilm al-kalam*, lit. the 'science of speech'. According to some, it was due to the fact that the science revolved around dogmatic discourse and speech. Yet, others believed that since the most controversial theological issue it resulted in was Allah's Speech (*kalam*), the science was thus named; *'ilm al-kalam*. The science of *kalam* primarily focuses on proving God's existence using Aristotelian categories. That is by proving that all that exists in the world is either categorised as a substance, or an accident subsisting in a substance. This being the first premise, the second premise states that accidents are not eternal for they come into being from non-existence. The third premise states that anything subject to accident itself is emergent, and therefore not eternal. Based on these premises they ruled that the world in its entirety, since it consists of substances and accidents, is emergent. Having established the temporal nature of the world, they further argued for two more premises to establish the existence of God; i) A temporal existence cannot be tipped into existence or non-existence without a determinant (or a cause), and ii) infinite regress of determinants is rationally absurd, and therefore, the 'chain-of-command' must end at the Eternal who brought everything into existence.

The aforementioned thought process resulted in the first rationalist movement, namely Mu'tazilism, clashing with numerous Quranic texts and traditions which, as they viewed, explicitly affirmed 'accidents' for God, such as Hearing, Seeing, Speaking, Knowing, Loving and Hating. To the Mu'tazilites, affirming such Attributes for God was rationally absurd, for it necessitated that God Himself is emergent, based on their premise that anything subject to an accident is emergent. To the traditionalist and the orthodox community, rationalism was therefore a heretical movement seeking to discredit the authority of the Quran and the Prophetic traditions, which together, formed the bedrock of Islamic thought and civilisation.

After the Mu'tazili defeat at the hands of the traditionalist movement, headed by Imam Ahmad b. Hanbal, the rationalist cause was championed by the Ash'arites, under the guise of defending traditionalism by utilising the rationalist weaponry – *'ilm al-kalam*. However, despite their intense campaigns to win approval from the wider Sunni community, they largely remained rejected, and by the passage of time, they drifted closer to the Mu'tazila.

It was not until 461 AH, that it was discovered in some of his writings praise for the Mu'tazila, and prayers for al-Hallaj, the infamous pantheist. The writings were then presented to the powerful and influential leader of the Hanbalis, Sharif Abu Ja'far, much to his horror, though not surprise, after which he issued a decree that Ibn 'Aqil be pursued and killed on sight. Following the decree, Ibn 'Aqil went into hiding for four years, until he finally decided to repent from his heresies in the presence of Sharif Abu Ja'far and the rest of his Hanbali colleagues.

About the treatise:

The treatise comes nearly a century after Ibn 'Aqil's death, indicating his continuing influence over some of the Hanbalis. Ibn al-Jawzi, being one of the most prominent Hanbalis influenced by Ibn 'Aqil's writings, does spring to mind as the one being addressed by Ibn Qudama in this treatise; however, the wording therein indicates that those addressed were most probably alive at the time it was written, that is between 603 and 620 AH, whereas Ibn al-Jawzi passed away in the year 597 AH. Nevertheless, it is still quite possible that Ibn al-Jawzi was one of those intended by this treatise, since historically, he is the most prominent, if not the only candidate for censure, who was renowned as a spiritual student of Ibn 'Aqil, and an inheritor of his legacy. The obvious link between Ibn 'Aqil and Ibn al-Jawzi was confirmed in Dhayl 'ala Tabaqat al-Hanabila by Ibn Rajab where it states: "[Ibn al-Jawzi] would also hold Abu al-Wafa Ibn 'Aqil in great respect, and follow most of his beliefs, in spite of refuting him in some issues. Despite Ibn 'Aqil's excellence in *Kalam*, he was not *au fait* on traditions and narrations, due to which he was inconsistent in this subject, with variegated opinions. Ibn al-Jawzi's opinions were as vegetated as his."[2]

There are several titles this treatise is known by, the most prominent of them: *tahrim al-nadhar fi kutub 'ilm al-kalam* (The Prohibition of Studying Works on Speculative Theology). It was translated into English and published by George Makdisi in 1962. This version is, in essence, Makdisi's translation; however, we have taken the liberty to alter the translation where necessary, and further added explanatory notes.

[2] Ibn Rajab, al-Dhayl 'Ala Tabaqat al-Hanabila 2/487-8, ed. Dr. al-'Uthaimin, Maktabat al-'Ubaikan 2005

The Text

[Author's introduction]

IN THE NAME OF GOD, THE COMPASSIONATE, THE MERCIFUL

1. Praise be to God in due proportion to His gifts and with due thankfulness for His bounty. I testify, with the testimony of a person sincere in declaring the *unity* of God (*tawhid*), that there is no god save God alone, and that He has no associate. I testify that Muhammad—God's blessing and peace be on him—is His servant and Apostle, Seal of the Prophets and the best of His servants. May the blessings of God be on him, on his family, on his Companions and on all those who cling to his Sunna and follow his example.

2. To proceed—I have come upon the scandal *(fadiha)* of Ibn ʿAqil which he had called "a good counsel;" *(nasiha)* and, having considered what it contained of vile heretical innovations and atrocious slander against those who pursue the clear and true path, I found it to be a disgrace to its author, for which God had dishonoured him and laid bare his depravity. Had he not returned to God in penitence for it, had he not cleansed himself and renounced it, had he not asked God's forgiveness for all the heretical innovations which he had uttered, or written in his own handwriting, or composed into books, or for those of which he had been accused, we would certainly have reckoned him in the ranks of the *zanadiqa*[3] and associated him with the schismatic inventors of heretical innovations. But since he has returned to God in penitence and amended, this heretical innovation and error of his should be regarded as having occurred before he had made his retractation, while he was still in the state of his heretical innovation and *zandaqa*. Moreover, he did return after his retractation to the authoritative text of the Sunna and with the best of arguments and the most efficacious of procedures he applied himself to the refutation of those who upheld his former doctrine, giving answer in the best possible way to the false arguments which were cited. His treatment regarding this subject is extensive, committed to large and small books and separate tracts, of which we have a considerable number.[4] So, perhaps his right-doing will blot out his wrong-doing, and perhaps his repentance will blot out his heretical innovation; for God accepts repentance from His servants and forgives the evil deeds.

3. I used to wonder at the Imams among our companions who, before Ibn ʿAqil

[3] *Zanadiqa* is the plural of *zindiq*, which technically refers to a heretical hypocrite who pretends to adhere to Islam while hiding his true beliefs. The word is originally Persian which was Arabized after the conquest of Persia.

[4] Ibn Rajab lists four theological works by Ibn ʿAqil; i) al-Irshad fi Usul al-Din (Guidance in Religious Foundations), ii) al-Intisar li Ahl al-Hadeeth (Championing the Traditionalist Cause), iii) Nafiy al-Tashbih (Negation of Anthropomorphism) and iv) Mas'ala fi al-Harf wal-Sawt (On a creedal issue pertaining to Divine Voice and Letters), a rebuttal of the Ash'arites. For further information on this treatise refer to footnote #9 (Ibn Rajab, al-Dhayl ʿala Tabaqat al-Hanabila 1/345-6, ed. Dr. al-ʿUthaimin, Maktabat al-ʿUbaikan 2005)

had made his retractation, declared him an unbeliever, deemed his blood fit to be shed, issued legal decisions to permit the taking of his life, and pronounced him a *zindiq*. But I could not imagine what it was that rendered this procedure necessary in his regard, nor what required that they pursue it to such extremes, until I had come upon this scandal. I knew then that it was because of it, and the likes of it, that they deemed permissible the shedding of his blood. I had already lighted by chance on some bad slips of his; but I have not found anything proceeding from him comparable to this one in which he employed himself in the reprobation of the Sunna, to a degree so excessive as not to have been equalled by a Mu'tazilite, nor by anyone else.

4. Our companions used to accuse him of *zandaqa*. The Shaykh Abu al-Khattab Mahfudh b. Ahmad al-Kalwadhani[5] said in reference to it in his poem:

Never have I ceased, since a member of Ahmad's School,
To speak in defence of their honour and protect it;
No object of desire averted me from upholding the truth,
Nor was I ever a zindiq, controversy's confederate.

—alluding to Ibn 'Aqil, inasmuch as he was accused of being one.

[Ibn 'Aqil's retractation]

5. The cause leading to his retractation, as related to me, was as follows: When this scandal had proceeded from him, Sharif Abu Ja'far[6] deemed his blood fit to be shed, and issued, together with his companions, legal decisions to permit the taking of his life. Ibn 'Aqil was in hiding for fear of being killed. One day, while he was on board a ship, he heard a young fellow-passenger say: "I wish that I could find this *zindiq* Ibn 'Aqil, so that I could advance myself in the favour of God by killing him and pouring forth his blood!" Thus frightened, Ibn 'Aqil disembarked, went to Sharif Abu Ja'far and made his retractation, asking for God's forgiveness.

6. I shall now relate his retractation and its circumstances, citing the chain of transmitters, so that it be known that those of his works which are found to be in contradiction to the Sunna are to be considered among those for which he has repented. Let no one therefore become deceived by them; let no one follow them, lest he go astray. He who follows them will be like Ibn 'Aqil before he had made

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[5] Mahfudh b. Ahmad al-Kalwadhani, commonly known as Abu al-Khattab, was one of the well-known Hanbali jurists of Baghdad. His teachers include al-Qadhi Abu Ya'la, while his students include 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jaylani. He died in year 510/1116. (Ibn Rajab, al-Dhayl 'ala Tabaqat al-Hanabila 1/270, ed. Dr. al-'Uthaimin, Maktabat al-'Ubaikan 2005

[6] 'Abd al-Khaliq b. 'Isa, al-Sharif Abu Ja'far b. Abi Musa, from the lineage of al-'Abbas, the uncle of the Prophet – SallAllahu 'alaihi wa-sallam – thus the title: *al-Sharif*; a jurist, a traditionist and a leading Hanbali of his age. After the death of his teacher, al-Qadhi Abu Ya'la, he became recognised as the chief of the Hanbali school. He is remembered as a daring and outspoken critic of both strands of the rationalist movement, the Mu'tazili and the Ash'ari. It was during his life when the troubles between the Hanbalis and the Ash'aris began, known in the annuls of history as *fitnat ibn al-qusayri* – the troubles of Ibn al-Qushayri. He died in year 470/1077 and was buried in close proximity of Imam Ahmad b. Hanbal.

his retractation, while still in the state of his *zandaqa,* and the shedding of his blood will become lawful.

7. I was given the information by the Shaykh and Imam, the trustworthy and competent traditionalist, Abu Hafs ‘Umar b. Muhammad b. Tabarzad al-Baghdadi, in the month of Dhu al-Qa’da, in the year 603, at our divinely guarded mosque—may God (exalted is He above all) continue to watch over it— located on the outskirts of Damascus. Reading it back to him, I said: You received the information by written licence (*ijaza*), if not by having personally heard it, from the most illustrious and learned Qadi, Abu Bakr Muhammad b. ‘Abd al-Baqi b. Muhammad al-Bazzaz, who said: On Monday, the 8th of the month of Muharram, in the year 465, I was present when the Shaykh and Imam, Abu al-Wafa’ b. ‘Aqil, made his retractation in the mosque of the Sharif Abu Ja’far, located in the quarter of Nahr Mu’alla. A multitudinous crowd was in attendance on that day. Ibn ‘Aqil said:

8. “ ‘Ali b. ‘Aqil states the following:
I declare myself pure before God from the systems of heretical innovators: Mu’tazilism and others; from having associated with its masters, treated its associates with veneration, invoked the mercy of God on their predecessors, and made a great display of their moral qualities. What I had copied, and what has been discovered in my handwriting, of their doctrines and errors, I hereby return to God in penitence for having written them and read them. It is not lawful for me to write them, or to read them, or to believe them.”

Ibn ‘Aqil mentions something else here,[7] then goes on to say:
“I beg of God forgiveness and I return to Him in penitence for having mixed with heretical innovators: Mu’tazilites and others; for having sought to imitate them; for having invoked God’s mercy upon them; and for having treated them with veneration. For all of this is forbidden; and it is not lawful for a Muslim to do such things, because of what the Prophet has said: ‘He who venerates the author

[7] The omitted text is as follows:
“Among the things which I have transcribed is a disputed issue of ‘night’. Some say it is composed of black bodies. But I said, ‘What I have heard from Shaykh Abu ‘Ali [Ibn al-Walid] is correct,’ he said, ‘It is nothingness, and cannot be considered a body, nor anything else.’ And I believed that. But I repent to God – Exalted is He above all! – in renouncing them [the Mu’tazilites].

I believed in al-Hallaj as a religious man, an ascetic, and a saint; and I maintained that opinion in a fascicle (*juz’*) which I composed. But I repent to God – Exalted is He! – in renouncing him. I attest that he was put to death as a result of the consensus of the jurists of the time, and that they were right, and he was wrong.” (Ibn Rajab, al-Dhayl ‘ala Tabaqat al-Hanabila 1/322-4, ed. Dr. al-‘Uthaimin, Maktabat al-‘Ubaikan 2005)

George Makdisi suggests that Ibn Qudama’s omission of the aforementioned passage is an indication of his Hallajism. However, this assumption is far from accurate since Hallajism was not singled out with omission. Ibn Qudama had also omitted the paragraph with respect to the question of ‘night’ being ‘black bodies’ where Ibn ‘Aqil favours Mu’tazilism. It would be absurd to assume that this particular omission was due to Ibn Qudama’s Mu’tazilism. Likewise, it is equally absurd to assume Ibn Qudama’s Hallajism on that basis. The most probable reason for Ibn Qudama’s omission is to abridge the original text of the retraction by mentioning only the relevant passages.

of a heretical innovation helps to bring about the destruction of Islam.' Our master, Sharif Abu Ja'far, and those Shaykhs and followers with him, my superiors and my colleagues were right in finding fault with me, because of what they had witnessed in my handwriting in those books from which I declare myself pure before God. I hereby affirm that I was wrong in them, not right. Should anything which is inconsistent with this writing and confession become retained against me, the Imam of the Muslims[8] shall have the right to punish me therefore, in accordance with the requirements of the Law, such as retention, exemplary correction, banishment and other forms of punishment. I have called on God, on His angels and on men of learning to be witnesses to all of that which I have confessed, doing so without compulsion or coercion. The inward and outward dispositions of my mind are the same regarding this confession. God has said: 'If anyone repeats the offence, God will take vengeance on him. God is mighty, wielder of vengeance.' "

9. Then the witnesses set down their attestations, transcripts of which follow: "The confessor has asked me to witness his having confessed all that is contained within the scope of this document. Signed: 'Abd Allah b. Ridwan,' in the month of Muharram, in the year 465.

"He called on me to witness the same. Signed: Muhammad b. 'Abd ar-Razzaq b. Ahmad b. as-Sunni, on the same date.

The confessor has asked me to witness his having confessed all that is contained within the scope of this document. Signed: al-Hasan b. 'Abd al-Malik b. Muhammad b. Yusuf in his own handwriting.

"I heard the utterance of this confession by the confessor himself. Signed: Muhammad b. Ahmad b. al-Hasan.

"The confessor asked me to bear witness of the same against himself. Signed: 'Ali b. 'Abd al-Malik b. Muhammad b. Yusuf."

This is the end of the retractation.

10. Muhammad b. 'Abd al-Baqi b. Muhammad b. 'Abd Allah" then wrote: On this day, a multitudinous crowd was in attendance at the mosque of Sharif [Abu Ja'far].

11. The present scandal is one of the sum of things for which Ibn 'Aqil returned to God in penitence, admitted that they consist in error and heretical innovation, and stated that if anything for which he repented should be found in his handwriting, punishment therefore will be strictly exacted from him, and God will take vengeance on him. How then can anyone allow himself to adduce these doctrines of his as arguments, or to be deceived by them, or to uphold them, or to

[8] The title 'Imam of the Muslims' is perhaps referring to the Abbasid Caliph al-Qa'im billah (d. 467/1075)

attach himself to them, despite the consensus of the learned men of his town to seek a retractation of them from him and, failing this, to allow his blood to be shed because of them and similar doctrines?[9] This indicates, more forcefully than anything else, his transgression and error. Now should these doctrines have proceeded from him after he had made his retractation, this would then be proof of his *zandaqa*, of his having persisted in his heretical innovation and reverted to his error. For the meaning of *zandaqa* is to make an outward show of belief in the true religion while inwardly adhering to its contrary. This religious hypocrisy used to be referred to as hypocrisy (*nifaq*) in the days of the Apostle of God; but today it is called *zandaqa*.

12. This man has composed a separate tract in condemnation of the allegorical interpretation of the divine attributes, and in refutation of those who thus interpret them. He has also composed a separate work treating of the "letters" and the "voice."[10] He is furthermore the author of *Kitab al-Intisar li al-Sunnah*, and other such books, all of which he filled with traditional doctrines and with the refutation of heretical innovators. If he was merely making this outward show of orthodoxy, while secretly adhering to heretical innovations, then he is a *zindiq*. How then can it be permissible for anyone to adduce his doctrines as arguments, or to approve for himself a condition such as his, or to go astray by following his error? But God preserve us! nor should this be even thought of him! Since, however, he is known to have had two states, a state of heretical innovation and a state of repentance, we ascribe all that has been discovered of his innovating tenets to the state of heretical innovation, nothing more.

13. Now, it is not my custom to mention the faults of our [Hanbali] companions; I would certainly prefer to hide their defects. But it has become necessary to expose the case of this man since some people have been deceived by his doctrines, and a

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[9] Here and in similar passages, perhaps, Ibn Qudama is referring to Ibn al-Jawzi and other Hanbalis like him who were influenced by Ibn 'Aqil's rationalist inclinations.

[10] The work being referred to here is known as Mas'ala fi al-Harf wal-Sawt. It has been published as al-Radd 'ala al-Asha'irah al-'Uzzal wa-Ithbat al-Harf wa'l-Sawt by George Makdisi in Bulletin d'Etudes Orientales, volume XXIV. It was later published with the title 'Juz' fi'l-Usul: Usul al-Quran' by Sulayman b. 'Abdallah al-'Umayr in 1413/1993. As the title suggests, the work argues that God speaks with letters and voice; the Quran, which is composed of letters and voice is uncreated; and that the legal texts pertaining to attributes must be viewed literally. Even though, the work is one of his fierce attacks on the Ash'arites, who are described by him as the Mu'tazila, Ibn al-Subki, a known Ash'arite fanatic, does not fail to enlist Ibn 'Aqil as an Ash'arite in his Tabaqat.

Some of Ibn 'Aqil's words in this treatise regarding the Ash'aris include:

"Behold! O Muslims, the Mu'tazili beliefs! How they expressed it in a fashion that negates the reality! Listen to what I tell you of their false claims, and the truth about their erred and misguided doctrine with regards to the Quran, and the fact they believe it is created without doubt!"

He also says of them:

"You feigned to the people that you are from the Ahl al-Sunna and the people of truth. You also titled yourselves as such, and how far you are from this title, while you belie the explicit text of the Quran!"

group of our companions have followed him in his heretical innovation. Their good opinion of him, and their conviction that he belonged in the ranks of those who summon to the obedience of the Sunna, caused them to fall into doubt with respect to their belief. It has therefore become necessary to lay bare his case and to remove their good opinion of him, so that their deception by his doctrines will leave them and the disease be arrested by cutting off its cause. For a thing comes to nought only at the source of its subsistence.—Assistance and direction to the right course rest with God. We ask of Him that He keep us steadfast in the path of Islam and the Sunna.

14. At any rate, he has inspired aversion for unquestioning imitation (*taqlid*) in matters of faith, and disallowed holding a good opinion of the Shaykhs. How then is it possible to entertain a good opinion of him who disallows such an opinion to be entertained of himself? And how is it possible to accept the statement of him who forbids the acceptance of another's statement? The proper thing for us to do is to accept what he says of himself—which would create a bad opinion of him—but not to accept what he says of another. His case would then be similar to one who confesses something against himself as well as against another: his statement against himself is accepted, but his statement against the other is not.

15. And now I shall give answer to his doctrines—God willing—article by article, and make evident the faultiness of his discourse, in its fundamental principles and in their applications—with God's direction toward the true course and with His assistance.

[The position of the *Salaf* on divine attributes]

16. His statement, "Indeed, we were once highly respected among the adherents of the various schools; but here we are today berated, expelled, repressed, etc."—is an indication from him to the effect that our *Salaf* followed certain doctrines and that we follow others; that we have thus innovated doctrines other than theirs, for which we deserve to be punished. But this is falsehood and defamation; it is the statement of one who has neither decency nor piety! Let him tell us what it is that we have innovated, and in which doctrine we have differed from our *Salaf*. If he should say, "you have abstained from the interpretation of the Quranic verses and the traditions which have come down to us with regard to the divine attributes," claiming that the *Salaf* did interpret them and explain them, then he is uttering falsehood, forging lies, and is guilty of the most grievous aberration. For there is no question about the fact that the doctrine of the *Salaf*, in this regard, consisted in acknowledgment, unreserved approval, and avoidance of the temerity of using allegorical interpretation and anthropomorphism (*tamthil*). Moreover, the fundamental rule is to presume the lack of their use of allegorical interpretation. So let him who claims that they did interpret them allegorically produce evidence in support of his statement. But there is no way of knowing this save by the transmission and relation of traditions. Let him then transmit to us traditions to this effect on the authority of the Apostle of God or that of his Companions, or on the authority of one of the Successors or one of the

approved Imams. Furthermore, he who claims this is one of the partisans of speculative theology; and they are the most ignorant of men with regard to the traditions of the Companions, the least possessed of knowledge with regard to those of the Successors, and the most neglectful of their transmission. Whence then would they have knowledge of traditions such as these? Even so, should anyone among them transmit something, his transmission would not be accepted, nor would he be heeded. The sole possessions of these people consist in forgery, falsehood, and false witness.

17. It is agreed among traditionists, orthodox and schismatics alike, that the doctrine of the *Salaf* as regards the attributes of God, consisted in acknowledging them, allowing them to pass intact, submitting unreservedly to their Author, and avoiding the temerity of undertaking their interpretation. It is with this information that the traditions have come down to us on their authority, both in general terms and in detail. Thus, it has been related on the authority of Malik b. Anas, al-Awza'i, Sufyan al-Thawri, Sufvan b. 'Uyayna, and Ma'mar b. Rashid, with regard to the traditions treating of the divine attributes, that they allowed them to pass intact as they had come down from the Prophet. Abu 'Urnar b. 'Abd al-Barr said in his *Kitab al-'Ilm*: "Those traditions which have come down to us through trustworthy traditionists on the authority of the Prophet, having proved to be sound on the authority of the Companions, constitute knowledge to be followed as one's religion. But that which was innovated after them, having no basis in what has come down to us on their authority, constitutes a heretical innovation and an error. We give our unreserved approval to those traditions treating of the names of God and His attributes, which have come down to us on their authority; and, as it was in their case, we do not dispute with regard to them. The *Salaf* related them, but held their tongues from discussing them, though they, of all men, were the most profound in religious knowledge, had the greatest breadth in understanding, and were the least meddlesome. Their silence was not the result of inability. He who does not deem fit for himself what was fit for them, will be misled and will lose the right way.

18. Muhammad b. al-Hasan, the disciple of Abu Hanifa, has related that the learned men of East and West are agreed that these traditions which have come down to us, treating of the divine attributes, are not to be interpreted—or words to that effect.[11]

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[11] Al-Lalika'i, Sharh Usul al-I'tiqad 3/480, Ibn Qudamah in Damm al-Ta'wil p.225 and al-Dhahabi in al-'Uluww 1/1008. The following were the words of Muhammad b. al-Hasan al-Shaybani being referred to:

"The jurists the from the East to West have all agreed, on having faith in the Qur'an and the traditions narrated by the reliable narrators on the authority of the Messenger of Allah – peace and blessings be upon him – concerning the Attribute of the Lord, the Mighty and Majestic, without explanation *(tafsir)*, description *(wasf)* and comparison *(tashbih)*. Whoever gives an explanation to any of it today has left what the Prophet – peace and blessings be upon him – was upon, and has departed from the community. For they neither described nor explained these attributes. They only gave verdicts in accordance with the Book and the Sunna and remained silent. So whoever holds Jahm's doctrine has departed from the community, because he has described God with the attributes of nothingness!"

19. A Hanbali has said: I asked Abu ʿAbd Allah Ahmad b. Muhammad b. Hanbal about those traditions which relate that God will be seen, that He descends to the heaven closest to the earth, and that He sets His foot down, and other relations similar to these. Whereupon, Abu ʿAbd Allah answered: We believe in them, and accept them as true, without rejecting any part of them, when their chains of transmitters are sound; nor do we refuse the statements of the Apostle, for we know that what he has brought to us is true. God should not be described in excess of His own description of Himself, boundless and immeasurable: **"There is nothing anything like Him! He is the Hearing, the Seeing."** [42:11] Therefore, we say exactly what He has said, and describe Him as He has described Himself without going beyond His description, nor removing from Him any of His attributes merely for fear of some possible slander which might be levelled against us. We believe in these traditions, we acknowledge them, and we allow them to pass intact as they have come down to us, without being able to understand the how of them (*bila kayf*), nor to fathom their intended sense (*wa la maʾna*),[12] except in accordance with His own description of Himself; and He is,

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[12] Some Ash'arites have claimed that Imam Ahmad's statement: 'nor to fathom their intended sense (ma'na)' indicates that he refused to acknowledge the primary, or literal meanings of the legal texts pertaining to the divine names and attributes. This understanding is flawed due to the following reasons:

1) Ahmad clearly declares in his Usul al-Sunnah "the hadeeth, in our estimation, is to be taken by its apparent *(dhaahir)* meaning, as it has come from the Prophet sallallahu 'alayhi wa sallam..."

2) The various narrations from Ahmad as collected by his early students and followers unanimously demonstrate that he would acknowledge the primary and literal meanings of the texts. For instance, it is well known that Ahmad would not suffice by saying 'Quran is God's Speech', but he would insist that one must add, '…and it is uncreated'. This indicates that he literally believed Quran to be God's Speech, which is why he categorically denied that it be God's creation. Abu Dawud also narrated that Imam Ahmad was asked: Does any one have an excuse to say that "[the Quran is] the Speech of God", and then remain silent? Imam Ahmad replied: "Why would he remain silent? If it wasn't for what the people have fallen into (i.e. the belief of the creation of the Quran), he may have remained silent. But since they (the Jahmites) have already spoken (that it is created), why would they (Ahl al-Sunnah) not speak?!"

This is an important statement where Imam Ahmad confirms that if it wasn't for the Jahmites negating that the Quran is literally the Speech of God, one may have an excuse for sufficing with: "Kalam Allah", without adding "not created". But when the Jahmites denied the literal meaning, Imam Ahmad obliged the Sunnis to use the terms and phrase unmentioned in the Quran to emphasise the literal meanings of the texts, that the Quran is literally the word of God, and not His creation.

Ahmad also literally affirmed that God speaks with a sound, as reported by his son, 'Abdullah; as he equally affirmed that God is literally above the creation, and to describe his belief, he used the word *'fawq'* (lit. above), instead of *'ala,* indicating that he affirmed the literal meaning.

3) The Hanbalis are unanimous about *ijra al-nusus 'ala al-dhawahir*, that is, to believe in the texts literally, as declared in several works by early Hanbalis as well as the latter; al-Qadhi Abu Ya'la, Ibn Qudama, Ibn Taymiyya, Mar'i al-Karmi and al-Saffarini, to name but a few. Ibn Taymiyya, amongst the Hanbalis greatly endeavoured to explain not only the Hanbali doctrine, but the Sunni doctrine at large, He also concluded that Imam Ahmad would affirm the literal meanings of the divine texts, a claim left unchallenged by all Hanbalis who succeeded him. In fact, there would not be a challenge if Ibn Taymiyya's predecessors and successors amongst the Hanbalis were unanimous over the issue, save Ibn al-Jawzi, whose biographical

according to His own description, the Hearing, the Seeing, boundless and immeasurable. His attributes proceed from Him and are His own. We do not go beyond the Quran or the traditions from the Prophet and his Companions; nor do we know the how of these (*kayf*), save by the acknowledgment of the Apostle and the continuation of the Quran.[13]

20. Abu 'Abd Allah also said: One day, Waki' related to us one of these traditions, and Zakariya b. 'Adi shuddered. Whereupon, Waki', having become angry, said: We are old enough to have heard al-A'mash and Sufyan' relating these traditions without denying them. This is something in respect of which we know of no differences among our *Salaf*. He who denies them is either ignorant or feigns ignorance, is wanting in piety and decency, and when lying, he neither fears God, nor is he ashamed of himself before men.[14]

21. Now as for us, we follow the path of our *Salaf*, and the beaten track of our Imams, and the Sunna of our Prophet. We have not innovated any doctrines, nor have we made any innovating additions to theirs. On the contrary, we believe in the traditions which have come down to us, and allow them to pass intact, exactly

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notice is marred with criticisms directed at him for departing from Imam Ahmad's doctrine by opting for allegorical interpretation (*ta'wil*) of divine attributes.

4) The early scholars were primarily divided into two groups; the proponents of the literal meanings, and the advocates of allegorical interpretation. The phenomenon of negating the literal meanings without resorting to an allegorical interpretation was, at least during the 7th or the 8th Islamic century, a newly invented concept, unknown to the early scholars. In this regard, a famous 8th century Shafi'i historian and a traditionist, al-Dhahabi declares: "The latter ones from the speculative theologians *(ahl al-nadhar)* invented a new belief, I do not know of anyone preceding them in that. They said: 'These attributes are passed on as they have come and not interpreted *(la tu'awwal)*, while believing that the literal meaning is not intended *(dhahiruha ghayr murad)*.' " (al-Dhahabi, al-'Uluw 2/1329, ed. 'Abdullah al-Barrak, Dar al-Watan 1999) He then goes onto state that the primary linguistic meaning is what the early scholars affirmed.

With respect to the particular statement of Imam Ahmad, as mentioned by Ibn Qudama, the following observations could be made:

1) The word 'meaning' is an ambiguous term in and of itself, as it could refer to the definition of a word, the lexical meaning, and the allegorical interpretation contrary to the literal meaning. It is very possible that the negation of 'meaning' here is referring to an allegorical meaning which the Mu'tazilites would promote, knowing that they were Ahmad's greatest detractors. It is similarly, very unlikely that his statement would be directed towards the anthropomorphists, since they were hardly influential.

2) In this very narration, Ahmad is also asked about God's vision on the Last Day. Since the traditionalists in bulk, and the vast majority of the Ash'arite rationalists, believe in God's vision literally, it is highly unlikely, if not impossible, that Ahmad would negate the literal meaning of 'God's vision'. This is perhaps one of the strongest arguments against the assumption that Ahmad negated the literal meanings of legal texts pertaining to divine attributes.

[13] Ibn Qudama, al-Dham al-Ta'wil 1/22, ed. Badr b. 'Abd Allah al-Badr, Dar al-Salafiyya 1406; similar narration also reported by al-Lalika'i in Sharh Usul I'tiqad Ahl al-Sunnah 3/502, ed. Ahmad b. Sa'd al-Ghamidi, Dar Tayba 2005

[14] Ibn Ma'in, al-Tarikh no.2543 (in the transmission of al-Duri), al-Dulabi in al-Kuna wal-Asma' 1:199-200, al-Daraqutni in al-Sifat p.69, Ibn Mandah in K. al-Tawhid p.211, Ibn Qudamah in Damm al-Ta'wil p.232 and al-Bayhaqi in al-Asma' wa'l-Sifat 2:197

as they have come from the Prophet; we uphold their teachings; we hold our tongue from discussing those things about which they were silent; we pursue the same course of conduct as they did. Therefore, there is no reason to accuse us of disagreement and innovation.

22. Ibn ‘Aqil was merely speaking of his own condition, while in the state of innovation. When he introduced innovations into the religion of God and differed from his *Salaf*, from his Imams, and from the notable members of his school, and followed the partisans of speculative theology (*kalam*) and heretical innovations, abandoning orthodoxy and taking up heresy—his blood was deemed fit to be shed, his mind was made insecure, he became the object of injury and flight, intimidation and pursuit, and finally, he became humiliated and despised. So he ascribed his own condition to others; and misrepresented the innovation which issued from him as proceeding from others than himself. He clothed others with his own description, and accused the people of the Sunna of a sin similar to his own, as the saying goes: *“She reproached me with her own fault, and slipped away.”*

23. As for the people of the Sunna who follow the traditions and pursue the path of the righteous *Salaf*, no imperfection taints them, nor does any disgrace occur to them. Among them are the active learned men, the friends of God and the virtuous men, the God-fearing and pious, the pure and the righteous; those who have become friends with God and performed miracles, and those who worship in humility and exert themselves in the study of religious law. It is with their praise that books and registers are adorned. Their annals embellish the congregations and assemblies. Hearts become alive at the mention of their life histories, and happiness ensues from following in their footsteps. They are supported by religion; and religion is by them enforced. Of them the Quran speaks; and through the Quran they themselves express. And they are a retreat for men when events afflict them: for kings, and others of lesser rank, seek their visits, regarding their supplications to God as a means of obtaining blessings, and asking them to intercede for them with God.[15]

[The position of the *Salaf* on Speculative Theology – *‘ilm al-kalam*]

24. We, then, are the authors of excellent exhortations; to us belongs the glory of this world and the next. He who looks into the books which learned men have devoted to the praise of God’s friends, will find mention there only of our kind. When relations of miracles are transmitted, they are transmitted only as proceeding from us; and when a preacher, or any other learned person, wishes to render his exhortation pleasing and embellish it, he does so by relating the lives of some of our ascetics, or the miracles of our devotees, or the portraits of our learned men. And at the mention of our pious, the mercy of God settles upon

[15] The phrase, ‘asking them to intercede for them with God’, refers to asking them to supplicate to God on their behalf, since the supplications of the pious are more likely to be answered.

men, hearts become calm, prayers are answered, and afflictions are removed. What a gifted poet was he who said:

Gone is the predominance of heretical innovators;
Their bond first weakened then failed altogether.
Leagued in rending their union asunder
Was the faction of Iblis who'd first brought them together.
Pray tell, in God's name, have you, in your innovation,
Some jurisprudent or some Imam worthy of being followed?
Such as Sufyan, the Thawri, it was he
Who first taught men the secrets of piety.
Or Sulayman, the Taymi, it was he
Who, for the fears of the Day of Judgment, shunned sleep.
Have you such as Malik, Imam of the Two Cities?
That Sea of religious knowledge free from contamination.
Or such as Syria's jurisprudent, its own Awza'i?
Who would succeed against the best of Quranic reciters.
Or such as Islam's Brave, I mean Ahmad?
There's religion's bastion! verily a bastion is impregnable!
He did not fear their whip as they threatened him;
Nay, nor did he fear the gleaming swish of their sword![16]

As for Ibn 'Aqil his faction consists of the partisans of speculative theology (*kalam*). To speak of them is but to censure them, to caution against them, to inspire with aversion against associating with them, to order abandoning and shunning them, and to abstain from studying their works. Not a single one among them can gain a firm foothold in friendship with God;[17] nor will arty banner of theirs establish itself among the pious; nor will any among them be blessed with a miracle; nor will they see, in the life to come, either their Lord or His highly esteemed friends. They declare the miracles of the pious to be false, and they deny the favours bestowed by God upon His believing servants. They are therefore intensely hated in this world, and they will be tortured in the next. None among them will prosper, nor will he succeed in following the right direction.

26. Imam Ahmad has said: "The partisan of speculative theology (*kalam*) will never prosper. No one is ever seen who has studied speculative theology, but that there is a corrupt quality to his mind."[18] And the Imam al-Shafi'i has said: "No one has borne upon his shoulders the mantel of speculative theology and prospered." He also said: "My judgment with respect to the partisans of speculative theology is that they be smitten with fresh leafless palm branches, that they be paraded among the communities and tribes, and that it be

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[16] The poem is attributed to Abu Ja'far al-Khawwas

[17] A statement along these lines is also transmitted from one of the legendary Sufis in history, namely Shaykh 'Abd al-Qadir al-Jaylani who was once asked: 'Can there be a friend of God *(wali)* on a creed other than that of Ahmad b.Hanbal?' He replied: 'There never was, and there never will be!'

[18] Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, Jami' Bayan al-'Ilm 2/942, ed. Abu al-Ashbal, Dar Ibn al-Jawzi 1998.

proclaimed: "this is the punishment of him who has deserted the Book and the Sunna, and taken up speculative theology." "[19] And Abu Yusuf[20] has said: "He who seeks religious knowledge through speculative theology, becomes a *zindiq*." And 'Umar b. 'Abd al-Barr has said: "Jurisprudents and traditionists among the inhabitants of all the great camp-cities are agreed that the partisans of speculative theology (*kalam*) are partisans of heretical innovations and of deviation. They are not generally considered to belong in the ranks of the scholars. The latter consist only of the people of tradition and those engaged in its study." [21] And Ahmad b. Ishaq al-Maliki[22] has said: "In the opinion of our [Maliki] colleagues, the partisans of erroneous opinions and heretical innovations are the partisans of speculative theology (*kalam*). Therefore, every speculative theologian belongs to the partisans of erroneous opinions and heretical innovations, be he Ash'arite or not. No testimony of his should be accepted; he should be ostracized, and punished for his heretical innovation; and if he sticks to it, he should be made to retract it."[23]

27. The censure of the partisans of speculative theology is abundant.[24] Now Ibn 'Aqil is one of the partisans of speculative theology and, as such, defends their system of thought. It is for this reason that we speak against him and mention his faults, on account of his having become one of their members, and urged others to follow their path.

[On *Taqlid* in beliefs]

28. As for this statement of his, "The stupid person is he who is deceived by his *Salaf* and relies upon the doctrines of his professors, trustful in following their authority without examining their doctrines," it consists of venomous, vicious words with which he allusively censures following the path of the pious *Salaf*, finding fault with what our lmams have praised and enjoined us to do; namely, to

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[19] Ibid. 2/941

[20] Ya'qub b. Ibrahim al-Ansari al-Qadhi Abu Yusuf, the closest disciple of Imam Abu Hanifa, from whom he narrated traditions and learned jurisprudence. In spite of being a leading proponent of Ahl al-Ra'i, he was described by Ibn Ma'in as an orthodox traditionist *(sahib hadith, sahib sunnah)*. He is also reported to have said: 'I belong to both of the groups (jurists and traditionists), and I do not prefer one over the other'. Amongst his other declaration with respect to speculative theology: 'Do not pray behind the one who says: The Quran is created. None who allows anything of speculative theology shall prosper', and: 'The knowledge of disputation and speculative theology is ignorance, and the ignorance of disputation and speculative theology is knowledge'. He died in the year 182 AH. He said on his dying bed: 'All the verdicts I issued I retract, except that which concurs with the Book and the Sunna' (al-Dhahabi, Siyar al-A'lam al-Nubula 7/707, Dar al-Fikr 1997)

[21] Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, Jami' Bayan al-'Ilm 2/942, ed. Abu al-Ashbal, Dar Ibn al-Jawzi 1998.

[22] Muhammad b. Ahmad b. Ishaq b. Khuayz Mindad, one of the famous Maliki jurists, described as an ardent dictator of the Ash'arite rationalists. He died in approximately 390 AH.

[23] Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, Jami' Bayan al-'Ilm 2/943, ed. Abu al-Ashbal, Dar Ibn al-Jawzi 1998.

[24] The traditionalists have compiled many works in censure of speculative theologians *(mutakallimun)*. Amongst them, Abu Abd al-Rahman al-Sulami (d. 412) who wrote Radd 'ala Ahl al-Kalam; Abu'l-Fadl al-Muqri' who wrote an epitome of the aforementioned work called Ahadith fi Damm al-Kalam; and perhaps the most famous and voluminous work on the subject by Abu Isma'il 'Abdullah al-Ansari al-Harawi al-Hanbali (d. 481) known as Dham al-Kalam wa Ahlihi, which has been published several times.

adhere to their path and be guided by their mode of life. On the other hand, he summons to the doctrines of the partisans of speculative theology, and to the study of sciences founded on reason; namely, the science of speculative theology, the censure of which we have already mentioned on the authority of the Imams, and its leading of its partisan to the states of *zandaqa*, heretical innovation and the total lack of prosperity. The evidence of what the Imams have said is manifest in Ibn ‘Aqil’s case. For since he devoted himself to it and preferred it to the science of tradition, he became a *zindiq* urging others to cease following the *Salaf* whose orthodoxy and right guidance are matters of general agreement, whom God has revealed His being satisfied with them and His having chosen them. He has also praised and commended them. Now sufficing you are those who have been praised and commended by God, and the accounts of those whom the Prophet has recommended, urging men to follow them and be guided by their example.

29. Moreover, our Imams and learned men have not ceased urging us to cling to their mode of life and adopt their course. Then along comes this poor wretch cautioning us against them and desiring us to form an evil opinion of them, abandon their path, and end by following the partisans of speculative theology and being guided by their example. This, now, is one of the most decisive indications of his error and of the evilness of his doctrines. For, were it not for his opposition to our Imams and his pursuing a path other than theirs, he would not have sought to inspire us with aversion against them.

30. Yet, at the end of this discourse, he did say: “God, fear God! Adhere to the path of the pious *Salaf*.” Thus, through a desire for covering up, he contradicted what he had just been saying, after having dishonoured his soul and removed its disguise by censuring their doctrines, by inspiring aversion against following them as guides and by urging others to oppose them. But we are not of those who accept what he says in dispraise of them who have been praised by God and His Apostle and Imams; nor will his statement cause us to abandon the path of those whose path we have been enjoined to pursue.

31. God has said: **“Those who have precedence, the first of the Emigrants and the Helpers, and those who have followed them in well-doing, God is satisfied with them and they are satisfied with Him.”**[9:100]— **“Muhammad is the Apostle of God. Those who are with him…”** [48:29]—to the end of the verse.

32. And the Prophet has said: “The best of men are those of my generation, then those who succeed them.”[25] He also said: “Do not revile my Companions; for, were one of you to give alms the size of Mount Uhud in gold, he would not be rewarded as one of them for giving a handful or half thereof.”[26]—“Verily, God has chosen me, and has chosen my Companions, and has made of them in-laws and

[25] Al-Bukhari and Muslim
[26] Al-Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawud and al-Tirmidhi.

helpers for me."[27]—" Keep to my Sunna and the Sunna of the rightly guided Caliphs after me; hold fast thereto."[28]—" Follow the example of those after me: Abu Bakr and 'Umar."[29]— "My Companions are like the stars; you will find guidance in following the example of whichever of them you choose."[30] The Prophet also said, when he spoke of the sects: "They shall all perish in Hell except one." "Which one is it?" he was asked. He replied:
"that to which I and my Companions conform."[31]

33. And it is related that Ibn Mas'ud said: "Verily, God looked into the hearts of mankind and found the heart of Muhammad to be the best; so He sent him with His message. Then again He looked into the hearts of mankind, and found the hearts of Muhammad's Companions to be the best after him; so He chose them for the companionship of the Prophet and his assistance."[32]—Our Imams have not ceased urging us to follow their path and be guided by their right mode of life.

34. Ibn Mas'ud has also said: "Let those among you who wish to be guided, follow the example of the Companions of the Apostle of God; for they were, of the people of this Community, the most pious in heart, the most profound in religious knowledge, the least meddlesome, the nearest in respect to the right direction, and the best in respect of condition;—a people whom God has chosen for the companionship of His Prophet and the establishment of His religion. Avow, therefore, their excellence, and follow in their footsteps, for they were pursuing the right direction."[33]—Some of these words, or words of their substance, have also been related on the authority of al-Hasan al-Basri.

35. Ibn Mas'ud has also said: "Follow the example of our predecessors and do not perpetrate heretical innovations; for you have been defended therefrom."[34]— "Verily, we take after the example of our predecessors, and do not initiate anything new; we follow their example and do not perpetrate heretical innovations; we shall not go astray, so long as we cling to tradition."[35]— ["Beware of turning innovator! beware of immoderation! beware of exaggeration and keep

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[27] Dha'if, due to an unknown narrator, 'Abd al-Rahman b. Salim b. 'Uwaym. However, al-Hakim still declares the hadeeth as Sahih while al-Dhahabi agrees.
[28] Sahih, collected by Abu Dawud, al-Tirmidhi, Ibn Majah and Ahmad
[29] Sahih, collected by Ahmad, Al-Tirmidhi who declares it Hasan, and al-Hakim declares it Sahih while al-Dhahabi agrees
[30] Dha'if. Ibn Hajar declares all its routes to be weak and further quotes al-Bayhaqi declaring that even though the text is well-known, all its chains are weak. Abu Bakr b. al-Bazzar states: "This saying is not authentically attributed to the Prophet SallAllahu 'alaihi wa-sallam." Ibn Hazm says: "This report is a lie, a fabrication and false!"
[31] Hasan only due to other matching reports. Narrated by al-Tirmidhi with a weak chain.
[32] Hasan. Narrated by Ahmad, al-Bazzar, al-Tabarani (al-Kabir).
[33] Dha'if. Narrated by Ibn 'Abd al-Barr in Jami' Bayan al-'Ilm 2/947, ed. Abu al-Ashbal, Dar Ibn al-Jawzi 1998. A similar narration is also attributed to Ibn 'Umar as mentioned by Abu Nu'aym in al-Hilya, but also with a weak chain. However, the meaning of the tradition remains true.
[34] Sahih, collected by Ahmad in al-Zuhd and al-Lalika'i in Sharh Usul I'tiqad
[35] Dha'if, collected by Al-Lalika'i

to the old religion!"][36]—" I am more fearful for your sakes of other things than I am of the Antichrist (Dajjal); namely, matters proceeding from your leaders. No matter which insignificant man or woman of those days had followed the first course. So I, today, follow the Sunna."[37]

36. Hudhaifa b. al-Yaman has said: "O Reciters of the Quran! take the path of those who preceded you. For, by God, if indeed you pursue the right course you will surely greatly succeed; but should you leave it to the right and to the left, you will go far astray.

37. Imam Ahmad has said: "The fundamental principles of the Sunna, in our opinion, consist in clinging to that which the Companions of the Apostle of God conformed to, following their example, and abstaining from heretical innovations. Every innovation is an error."[38]

38. A statement has been related on the authority of 'Umar b. 'Abd al-'Aziz, the import of which follows: Stop in matters of religion, maintaining an attitude of prudent reserve, where the first community of believers stopped; for they did so on the basis of good knowledge and, with critical perception, refrained from delving too far into religious questions. They were more fitted for the task of examining them, and would have been more worthy of favour, if such a deed earned favour. Now if you were to say, "these religious questions arose after them," the answer is that no one innovated them but he who has pursued a path other than theirs, and held himself superior to them. Indeed, they have discussed of these matters what is sufficient, and prescribed of them what suffices to relieve from doubt. To do less than what they have done would be to fall short of what is required; to do more, would be to inspire others to that which is unlawful. Some people fell short of the first believers, and thus did evil; others went too far, and thus fell into extremism. But those who maintain the middle course are indeed pursuing the right direction.[39]

39. Al-Awza'i, Imam of the Syrians, has said: Adhere steadily to the Sunna; stop in matters of religion, maintaining an attitude of prudent reserve, where the first community of believers stopped; pursue the path of your pious *Salaf*, for that which was fit for them is also fit for you; uphold their teachings; refrain from that from which they refrained. If theological speculation were a moral good, you would not have been especially singled out for it to the exclusion of your *Salaf*; for no moral good was treasured away from them which, to their exclusion, has been secretly kept for you through some excellence of your own. They are the

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[36] Sahih, collected by al-Darimi in al-Sunan and al-Bayhaqi in al-Madkhal. Ironically, the passage within [] is nonexistent in Makdisi's handwritten copy of the manuscript, yet existent in the English translation. Perhaps, the passage does exist in the original manuscript, which George Makdisi successfully included in his translation, but forgot to copy it out in Arabic.
[37] Collected by Al-Lalika'i and al-Darimi in al-Sunan
[38] Ibn al-Jawzi, Manaqib al-Imam Ahmad 230, ed. Dr. 'Abdullah al-Turki, Dar Hajr 1988; Ibn Abi Ya'la, Tabaqat al-Hanabila 2/166, ed. Dr. 'Abd al-Rahman al-'Uthaymin, 1999.
[39] Sahih, collected by Ibn Waddah in his work al-Bid'a and Abu Nu'aym in al-Hilya

Companions of the Apostle of God. God chose them, and sent His Prophet into their midst, and described them, saying: **"Muhammad is the Apostle of God. Those who are with him are violent against the unbelievers, compassionate amongst themselves" [48:29]**—to the end of the verse.[40]

40. A man asked al-Hasan b. Ziyad al-Lu'lu'i concerning Zufar b. al-Hudhail,[41] as to whether the latter used to study speculative theology (*kalam*). He replied: "Glory be to God! how stupid you are! Were you not the contemporary of our professors Zufar, Abu Yusuf and Abu Hanifa? And those in whose company we sat and from whom we learned, were they concerned with anything other than jurisprudence *(fiqh)* and following the example of the predecessors?"[42]

41. These then are the Imams, and these are their teachings, urging us to follow our *Salaf* and to be guided by their example. Now do you suppose that we shall desert the word of God, and the word of His Apostle, and the admonition of our Imams urging us to follow our *Salaf*, in order to accept Ibn 'Aqil's advice when he says: "Leave off following their example! Imitate me, and follow my teachings and the teachings of speculative theologians like me." He also seems to be saying: "I am he whose sins are numerous; I am he who is known for his heretical innovations and errors; I am he whose slips are numerous; I am he who is ignorant of traditions; I am he who prefers the censured science of speculative theology to the religious knowledge of our chosen Prophet. Follow me, then, and leave off following him; for he summons you to salvation, whereas I invite you to hell-fire's perdition!"

42. Moreover, all of us agree that consensus (*ijma'*) is a decisive argument. Therefore, when the companions agree on a matter, then are followed in it by the Successor-Imams, whose example is followed in turn by the Imams coming after them in each successive period, each urging the other to cling to it and warning their disciples against opposing it—how can it be said of him who follows that consensus to be stupid and deceived? The stupid, deceived, transgressing and innovating one is only he who opposes it and shuns it. God has said: **"But he who separates himself from the Apostle after the Guidance has become manifested to him, and follows any other way than that of the believers, We shall charge him with what he will have charged himself, and cause him to face Jahannam, and what a detestable outcome!"[4:115]**

[On *Ijtihad* in beliefs]

43. Should he say, "you were ordered only to make use of *ijtihad* and to refer to

[40] Sahih, collected by al-Aajurri in al-Shari'a
[41] Zufar b. al-Hudhayl al-'Anbari, a traditionist, a jurist and one of the foremost students of Imam Abu Hanifa. Al-Dhahabi describes him as one of the most an intelligent jurists who combined knowledge with actions; an honest and objective researcher who would strictly submit to the legal texts. He died in the year 158 AH (al-Dhahabi, Siyar al-'Alam al-Nubula 7/378, Dar al-Fikr 1997)
[42] Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, Jami' Bayan al-'Ilm 2/942, ed. Abu al-Ashbal, Dar Ibn al-Jawzi 1998.

that which is established by proof; you were forbidden to make use of the censured *taqlid;*" we would say in return: there are various answers to this objection. First, the freedom of the method of the *Salaf* from evils of any kind, and the soundness of its argument, has already been firmly established by decisive proof on the basis of the Quran, the Sunna, and the consensus (*ijma'*). There is therefore no need for discovering its soundness by some other proof. Secondly, this doctrine imposes an obligation upon the common people to make use of *ijtihad* in the minutiae of daily affairs and religious beliefs; and this is wrong for several reasons.

44. First, it entails accusing the Apostle of God of a fault of omission; for the Prophet did not order any one of his community to learn speculative theology, and to examine the rational proofs, that one might thereby know the soundness of his creed. On the contrary, he was contented with their pure and simple submission to God. He said: "I have been ordered to fight against men until they say: 'there is no god save God alone.' Once they have said this, they preserve their lives and property from my exaction, except for that which has been decreed with regard to them; and the reckoning as to their sincerity is God's affair."[43] Do you suppose that the Prophet be wrong in accepting that from them and in being contented with their pure and simple submission to God, rather than that they should learn the science of speculative theology and examine the "accident," (*'aradh*) the "substance," (*jawhar*) and the "body;" (*jism*) and, on the other hand, that the speculative theologians be right with respect to the transgression of him who neither learned nor examined those things? If this be so, then let them claim for themselves a law and a system of worship other than that of Islam, and leave alone Muhammad's religion.

45. Second: To impose *ijtihad* upon the common people is tantamount to imposing upon them that which is beyond their capacity. For were they to preoccupy themselves in some science, in the pursuit of which they were to exert themselves to the utmost, they would surely be detaching themselves from the means of livelihood, from the occupations of tilling and sowing the land. The world would lie in waste, people would perish, progeny would become extinct, holy war would become neglected, and countries would become ruined. But this cannot be. God has said, in effect: **"God lays not upon any soul except its capacity."**[2:286]

46. Third: The consensus (*ijma'*) has been concluded to the effect that the common people are not to be required to make use of *ijtihad* in legal prescriptions incumbent upon them, but that they have a right, in dealing with their affairs, to follow the authority of the learned men. God has likewise ordered them to ask the learned men among them, for He said: **"Ask the people of the Reminder, if you do not know."**[21:7]

47. Fourth: To profess the obligation of *ijtihad* upon all would entail a

[43] Al-Bukhari, Muslim, al-Tirmidhi (the tradition being his wording), al-Nasa'i, Abu Dawud, Ahmad, al-Hakim and al-Bayhaqi.

condemnation of the broad masses to error, by reason of their neglect of that which is incumbent upon them. The only thing in respect of which the use of *taqild* has been said to be unlawful for them is the manifest ordinance, which they know by virtue of its being manifest, without requiring special pains, thought, or examination; namely, the profession of the oneness of God (*tawhid*), the mission of Muhammad, the knowledge of the obligation of the five daily prayers, the fasting of Ramadan, and the rest of the pillars whose religious obligation is of common knowledge. These obligations, having become known by way of *ijma'* require no study or examination. Therefore, with regard to these obligations, it is unlawful for them to make use of *taqild*. But as for the minutiae of religious beliefs and the detailed prescriptions of the practices of worship and of contracts of sale, no one but an ignoramus would profess the obligation of the broad masses to make use of *taqlid* with regard to these matters; its use is unfounded by virtue of what we have aid.

48. Now, if someone should become deceived by these doctrines of Ibn 'Aqil, and not be contented with following his *Salaf*, nor be satisfied with following his Imams, nor hold lawful the following of their authority in such matters as abstaining from the interpretation of the divine attributes which have been contested—what then is he to do? Does he have a way to the knowledge of what is sound in these matters through his own personal effort and his rational speculation? When will he at last come to a point at which he will be able to distinguish between a sound argument and a faulty one? Now, here you have Ibn 'Aqil who has asserted that throughout his lifetime, he exhausted his total capacity on speculative theology, along with all his intelligence and sagacity; he did not prosper, nor did he succeed in the right direction. On the contrary, his case finally ended in his committing heretical innovations leading astray, in abominable wrong-doing, and in his abandoning what is right, until he was made to retract his doctrines and to confess against himself admitting his heretical innovation and error. Now, you who are deceived by these doctrines of his, when will you attain to his level of knowledge? And suppose that you have attained it, what is it about his condition that has so excited your admiration that you take him as an example to follow?—We have already mentioned the teachings of the Imams with regard to the censure of speculative theology and its partisans; and we beg of God security from all evil.

49. Fifth: When we examine the evidence, we find that it positively prescribes the opposite of what is urged by Ibn 'Aqil; that is, to believe in the Quranic verses and the traditions treating of the divine attributes, with acknowledgment and unreserved approval, and to abstain from allegorical interpretation, from divesting God of His attributes, and from *tashbih* and *tamthil*-anthropomorphism, in accordance with the doctrine of the pious *Salaf* and the approved Imams. This will be clearly shown in nine ways.

50. First: The saying of God: **"He it is who has sent down the Book to you. In it are clearly formulated verses (*muhkamat*) which are the essence of the Book; while others are obscure (*mutashabihat*). Those in whose hearts is an inclination to go astray, follow what is obscure,**

seeking trouble, and seeking the interpretation of these verses.” Thus He censured the follower of interpretation and coupled him in the censure with the seeker of trouble, making his seeking thereof an indication of inclination to go astray. This shows that his seeking is not lawful. Then He cut them off from what they had hoped for, and prevented them from attaining what they had sought, by His saying: **“But no one knows the interpretation of these verses except God.”** Then He continued: **“And those well-grounded in knowledge say: ‘We believe in it. All is from our Lord. No one takes warning but those of insight.’ ”** Then they asked their Lord not to make them like the deviating followers of allegorical interpretation, by saying: **“O, our Lord! do not incline our hearts to go astray, after having guided us.”** [3:7-8][44]

51. Second: If the allegorical interpretation of the divine attributes were obligatory, the Prophet would have made it clear to his community; for it is unlawful to delay giving the clear declaration beyond its appointed time.[45]

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[44] The scholars have differed over the interpretation of the verse with respect to muhkam and mutashabih in the Quran. One of the main reasons for that is the two different ways of reciting the verse:

i) “But no one knows the interpretation of these verses except God<full-stop> And those well-grounded in knowledge say: ‘We believe in it. All is from our Lord.’ ” – implying that the knowledge of the mutashabihat is known to God alone. This is the position of many of the scholars such as ‘A’isha, Ubay b. Ka’b, Abu ‘Ubayda, Qatada, ‘Umar b. ‘Abd al-‘Aziz, Tha’lab, and others.

ii) “But no one knows the interpretation of these verses except God and those well-grounded in knowledge<full-stop> They say: ‘We believe in it. All is from our Lord.’ ” – implying that the knowledge of the mutashabihat is known to God as well as those well-grounded in knowledge. This is the position of Mujahid, the student of Ibn ‘Abbas, al-Dhahhak, the Mu’tazila and Abu al-Hasan al-Ash’ari, al-Nawawi, Ibn al-Hajib, al-Aamidi and others.

Thereafter, the scholars also differ as to what exactly the terms muhkam and mutashabih refer to, into five or more opinions. Ibn Qudama’s opinion, as found in his Rawdat al-Nadhir, is that the term ‘mutashabihat’ refers to the divine names and attributes mentioned in the Quran in particular, since we are ordered to accept them as they are without attempting to interpret them. The point to note, however, is that none of opinions with respect to the term ‘mutashabihat’ dictate the negation of the primary meanings of the texts pertaining to the divine names and attributes. In fact, Imam Ahmad b. Hanbal deemed the term ‘mutashabihat’ in reference to those verses that have a correct and an in correct interpretation and thus titled his famous work: ‘A Rebuttal of the Jahmite Heretics with respect to their doubts over the mutashabih of the Quran, and their interpretation thereof contrary to the correct interpretation.’ Nor should it be understood that Ibn Qudama refused to acknowledge any primary meaning of the texts, for he states in this very treatise in paragraph number 75: ‘nay rather their very recitation is their interpretation’, affirming that the texts have an interpretation which is what is obvious and apparent. The fact that Ibn Qudama affirmed the literal meanings of the texts is self-evident from his various theological writings. For instance, Ibn Qudama writes in his theological primer Lum’at al-I’tiqad: ‘‘These texts and the like, the chain of which has been authenticated, and the narrators of which are upright, we believe in them, and do not reject them nor deny them, nor do we give them a interpretation which opposes their literal meanings.”

[45] The author here refers to the legal maxim: *ta’khir al-bayan ‘an waqt al-haja la yajuz* - it is unlawful to delay giving the clear declaration beyond its appointed time. The maxim means that it is impossible for the Prophet to delay giving clear injunctions over an issue beyond its appointed time. Hence, if allegorical interpretation was necessary, the Prophet would have declared as such, to us, without any delay. (See Mawsu’a al-Qaw’id al-Fiqhiyya by al-Burno Abu al-Harith al-Ghazzi 3/148, Maktabat al-Tawba 1997)

Furthermore, if the use of allegorical interpretation were incumbent upon us, it would also have been incumbent upon him; for, so far as the legal prescriptions are concerned, he is on the same level as we. Now, if it had been incumbent upon him, he would not have neglected it; and because of his great solicitude for his Community, he did not conceal from them anything which God had ordered him to do. Indeed, God has said: **"O Apostle! Deliver what was sent to you from your Lord I If you do it not, then you have not delivered His message."**[5:67]

52. Third; It has been established with certainty that the doctrine of the *Salaf* and the Imams who succeeded them, as regards these Quranic verses consists in acknowledgment, unimpaired transmission, agreement and unreserved approval, without allegorical interpretation and without divesting God of His attributes. We have already clearly proved that their doctrine is the true one and that they pursue the right direction; therefore, it is not lawful to oppose their course, nor to deviate from their path.

53. Fourth; Allegorical interpretation is tantamount to the passing of judgment upon God regarding matters which the interpreter does not know, and the interpretation of His intent by that which the interpreter does not know that He intended. Now, the most that the interpreter can claim is that a given expression admits a given meaning in the classical language. But it does not necessarily follow from the mere fact of the expression's admissibility of this meaning, that this meaning is intended by it. For just as it may admit this meaning, it may also admit others. It may even admit still other meanings with which the interpreter is not acquainted. Besides, he does not possess an encompassing knowledge of the content of dialects. This is especially true of the speculative theologians; for they are strangers to the knowledge of the dialects and the useful sciences. And God has forbidden that He be spoken of in ignorance; for He has said; **"Say: My Lord has only forbidden indecencies, both open and secret, as well as sin, trespassing against truth, the association with God of that for which He has not sent down any authority, and the saying against God of what you do not know."**[7:33]

54. Fifth: Allegorical interpretation is a novelty in religion. Now a novelty is any doctrine in religion with regard to which the Companions had died without ceasing to keep their silence. Novelty in religion is the heretical innovation against which our Prophet had cautioned us, and of which he informed us that it is the most evil of things. He has said: "The most evil of things are the innovated ones."[46] He has also said: "Keep to my course of conduct, and the course of conduct of the rightly guided Caliphs after me: hold fast thereto. Beware of innovated things; for every innovation is a heretical innovation, and every heretical innovation is an error."[47] Now, the allegorical interpreter has deserted

[46] Sahih. Collected by Ibn Majah, Ibn Abi 'Aasim in his Sunna and al-Lalika'i in Sharh Usul I'tiqad Ahl al-Sunnah.
[47] Sahih. Refer to fn. 28

the Sunna of the Apostle of God and that of the rightly guided Caliphs; he is an inventor of heretical novelties, gone astray by virtue of the tradition mentioned.

55. Sixth: Allegorical interpretation is meddlesomeness, foolishness, immoderation, words held forth in ignorance, and exposure of oneself to danger regarding that which is not called for by necessity. For we have no need to know the meaning which God intended by His attributes; no course of action is intended by them, nor is there any obligation attached to them except to believe in them, and it is possible to believe in them without the knowledge of their intended sense. For indeed faith, with ignorance, is sound. God has enjoined belief in His angels, His scriptures, His prophets and that which He has revealed to them, though we might not know of this except the designation. God has said: **"Say: We believe in God, in what has been sent down to us, and in what has been sent down to Abraham"**[2:136]—to the end of the verse. We have been prohibited from innovating, from immoderation and from meddlesomeness. God said to His Prophet: **"Say: I ask you not for any reward for it, nor am I of those who take things upon themselves."**[38:86]

56. Seventh: If allegorical interpretation were obligatory, it would either be incumbent upon all individuals, or upon him to whom its proof has become established. If it be incumbent upon everyone and adhere to all people notwithstanding their lack of knowledge of its proof it would entail the constraint to speak in ignorance, and to permit oneself the audacity to speak falsely and conjecturally about the attributes of God, His Book and His verses. But this, it is generally agreed, is forbidden. Now since it is not incumbent upon him who does not know it, how then can they enjoin the generality of men, including those who do not know it, to make use of it, and reprove them for neglecting it? If they were possessed of the fear of God, they would dispense them from the use of allegorical interpretation, and order them to abstain from meddling with what they do not know.

57. Eighth: Allegorical interpretation is the use of private opinion in treating of the Book of God and the Sunna of His Apostle. He who treats of the Book of God according to his private opinion commits an offence, even though he may be right. Abu Bakr al-Siddiq, when asked about "*al-abb*,"[48] said: "What heaven would protect me and what earth would carry me if I were to say about the Book of God that which I do not know?"[49]

58. Ninth: The allegorical interpreter combines the ascription to God of an attribute which He did not ascribe or adjoin to Himself, with the negation of an attribute which God did adjoin to Himself. When the allegorical interpreter says, "the intended sense of 'rising over' *(istawa)* is 'to gain mastery over,' " he is

[48] Referring to the Quranic verses: **"Then We broke open the earth, splitting it with sprouts, and caused to grow within it grain… And fruit and grass *[abb]*"** ['Abasa 26-31]

[49] Dha'if due to disconnection in chain. See Tafsir Ibn Kathir for 80th Sura.

ascribing to God the attribute of '*gaining mastery over*' *(istawla)*. But God did not ascribe this attribute to Himself. He is also negating the attribute of '*rising over*' *(istawa)*, notwithstanding its reiteration by God in the Quran in seven places.[50] Now, was not God capable of saying *istawla* until the meddlesome allegorical interpreter came along affecting cleverness and defying God and His Apostle?— Supremely exalted is He above that which the wrongdoers say of Him!

59. Since the door of allegorical interpretation has become closed by virtue of all of these ways, though any one of them is sufficiently capable of closing it, there remains but the clear path, the true saying, and the pursuance of God's path, the regularity of which is indicated by the traditions; the path which was pursued by the pure Companions and the excellent Imams, trodden by the pious and pursued by the God-fearing; the adherence to which was enjoined by the counselling, truthful Imams. That is, to believe in the Quranic expressions and verses, and in the traditions; according to the sense which God intended for them; to be silent with regard to what we do not know of their meaning; to abstain from examining that part of their interpretation which God did not obligate us to examine, nor made its science known to us; to follow the path of those entrenched in knowledge whom God commended in His perspicuous Book, when they said: **"We believe in it. All is from our Lord."**[3:7] This is the safe path which holds no danger for its pursuer, nor solicitude, nor fear, nor evil. He who pursues it will be secure; but he who abandons it will become corrupt and have cause to regret. It is the path of the believers indicated by the Sunna, and which was pursued by the Umma's pious ones. **"But he who separates himself from the Apostle after the Guidance has become manifested to him, and follows any other way than that of the believers, We shall charge him with what he will have charged himself and cause him to face Jahannam, and what a detestable outcome"**[4:115]

60. The censurer of this discourse must either censure belief in the Quranic expressions or he must censure that act of abstaining from their interpreting them, or both. Now if he censures belief in the Quranic expressions, these expressions were spoken by the Lord of the Worlds and by His truthful and faithful Apostle, and therefore the censurer would be denying God, the Incomparably Great. He who censures belief in them both must either believe in them both or deny them. If he believes in them, how can he censure that to which he conforms? And if he denies them, he secedes from the Islamic religion *(islam)*

[50] The seven places are: i) al-A'raf 54: **"Indeed, your Lord is Allah who created the heavens and the earth in six days and then rose over the Throne"**; ii) Yunus 3: **"Indeed, your Lord is Allah who created the heavens and the earth in six days and then rose over the Throne"**; iii) al-Ra'd 2: **"It is Allah who erected the heavens without pillars that you [can] see; then He rose over the Throne"**; iv) Taha 5: **"The Most Merciful rose over the Throne"**; v) al-Furqan 59: **"He who created the heavens and the earth and what is between them in six days, and then rose over the Throne"**; iv) al-Sajda 4: : **"It is Allah who created the heavens and the earth and what is between them in six days, and then rose over the Throne"**; iiv) al-Hadid 4: **"It is He who created the heavens and the earth and what is between them in six days, and then rose over the Throne"**.

and declares himself quit of the faith *(iman)*. God has said: **"None reject Our signs but the unbelievers."**[29:47]

61. Now, if he censures the abstention from interpretation, he is wrong; for we know of no interpretation for these expressions; and he who has no knowledge of a thing is obliged to keep silent about it; to speak about it is forbidden to him. God has said: **"Do not follow that of which you have no knowledge."**[17:36] And He said, in mentioning the forbidden things: **". . . and the saying against God of what you do not know."**[7:33] Now, since we do what God has made incumbent upon us, and avoid what He has forbidden, there is no reason to blame us for it. The blame is only on him who opposes this conduct and censures it.

62. And again, the censurer of this discourse condemns the Apostle of God; for the latter believed in God and in His words, but he did not interpret anything thereof, nor did he clarify their intended sense. He who condemns the Apostle of God does not believe in Him. And he who condemns the Apostle of God is indeed the transgressor, the grievous sinner, the disgraceful and blameworthy one.

63. Furthermore, the censurer of this discourse condemns those entrenched in knowledge whom God has commended, and the matter in respect of which God praised them, namely, unreserved approval and faith. Moreover, he is ridiculing all of the *Salaf*. Now there is no doubt as to the transgression of him who blames all of these people; nor is there any doubt as to his heretical innovation and error.

64. Since we, ourselves, are included in the ranks of those whom God has commended, and whose deeds and words He has pronounced to be right, no harm can follow us from the censure of one afflicted with diabolical possession, a heretical innovator abandoned of God. And since we pursue our Lord's path, the path which He has seen fit for us, we shall not heed the unwillingness of him who pursues the path of Satan the accursed, the path which brings him to the midst of Hell.

If my censure comes to you from one of low character,
It is testimony in evidence of my excellent qualities!

65. At any rate, we have no doctrine for which we might be blamed. If we be blamed for the Quranic expressions in which we believe, no one is being blamed but Him who said them, nor are the censurers disacknowledging anyone except Him who gave utterance to them. It is He who will punish them for their unbelief and heresy. If we be blamed for our silence, silence, at least, is not a doctrine, nor can any doctrine be ascribed to one who keeps silent. If they say, "you believe in what they contain of *tamthil*-anthropomorphism," they but lie against us and accuse us of that of which God already knows us to be guiltless. Besides, they have no way of looking into our minds. Only the tongue can express what is in the mind; and our tongues are ever declaring the rejection of *tashbih, tamthi* and *tajsim*-anthropomorphism. They therefore have no right to set themselves up as

our judges by accusing us of that which has not arisen or proceeded from us. The grievous sin falls upon the author of the lie exclusive of its victim, in the same manner as the legal punishment for calumny falls upon the calumniator, not upon the calumniated. It suffices us as praise and justification that out opponents do not find any fault in us for which they could blame us and be confirmed, while we admit it. They only censure us with their lying. If they were capable of finding fault, there would have been no need for them to resort to lying.

[On *akhbar ahad*]

66. He states that "the rejection of traditions is obligatory because they are traditions transmitted by a single traditionist (*akhbar ahad*)" and that "the decisive rejection of *tashbih* and *tamthil*-anthropomorphism has been firmly established by rational proofs." As for the former statement, there are two ways of answering it:

67. First, by clearly showing that it is obligatory to accept these traditions for two reasons. First, the agreement of the Imams as to their transmission, relation and publication in the *Sahih* and *Musnad* collections of traditions,[51] and their registration in the other collections of tradition; also, the traditionists of the *Huffadh* pronouncing them to be sound, and pronouncing their relators to be precise *(al-itqan)* and upright *(al-'adala)*. Discarding them would therefore be in contradiction to the consensus *(ijma')* and in rebellion against the people of universal agreement. He should therefore not be paid any regard or attention. Secondly, the relators of these traditions are themselves the transmitters of the Law and the relators of the legal prescriptions. It is they who are entrusted as to the clear distinction between the lawful and the unlawful, and what constitutes obedience to God. If we nullify their doctrines by our interpretation, these doctrines would of necessity become refuted; then the Law will become void, and religion will disappear.

68. Second: We will not submit to him that all of them are traditions transmitted by a single traditionist. There are those among them which have been transmitted through numerous concurring ways, each confirming the other, each bearing witness in favour of the other. Although each tradition transmitted by a single traditionist cannot claim transmission by *tawatur*, yet there results from the aggregate the decisiveness and certainty of the steadfastness of its origin. This is sufficient for the constitution of *tawatur*. Thus we confirm the generosity of Hatim[52], the bravery of 'Ali, the equity of 'Umar, the religious knowledge of 'A'isha and the caliphate of the first four Caliphs, without there having been transmitted to us with regard to them as a sole tradition by *tawatur*. But since

[51] A Sahih collection is one in which the compiler only lists traditions that are deemed authentically attributed to the Prophet – SallAllahu 'alaihi wa-allam. A Musnad collection is one in which the compiler arranges the traditions in order of the Prophet's companions.
[52] Hatim b. 'Abdullah al-Ta'i al-Qahtani was a famous Arab poet and a knight of the pre-Islamic era, who became a legendary symbol of generosity and hospitality. He is said to have died eight years after the Prophet's birth. (Khayr al-Din al-Zirikli, al-A'lam 2/151, 15th edition Dar al-'Ilm al-Malayin 2002)

various traditions made them public, each tradition confirming the other, and no one discrediting them, *tawatur* resulted from the aggregate. So is it also in the present case.

69. As for the allusion he makes regarding the rejection of *tashbih* and *tajsim*-anthropomorphism, it is merely something which the speculative theologians and the partisans of heretical innovations have invented, seeking thereby to obtain the nullification of the prophetic traditions, the rejection of the traditions of the Companions and Successors, and the deception of the ignorant and the inexperienced, in order to have them believe of them that "our purpose is merely to purify the essence of God and reject *tashbih*-anthropomorphism." This is comparable to the practice of the Esoterics (*batiniya*)[53] in clinging to the Prophet's family, and in making an outward show of thorough inquiry, causing the common people to imagine that they wish to aid them against their enemies. But they only used the Prophet's family as a screen to cover up their efforts to nullify the Law and enable themselves to blame the Companions and the four orthodox Caliphs by accusing them of unjust treatment of the Prophet's family and of transgression against them.

70. In the same manner, the sect of speculative theologians and heretical innovators has clung to the rejection of *tashbih*-anthropomorphism, seeking thereby to blame the people of tradition and to abolish the traditions. If not, then in what way has this anthropomorphism resulted? If it has resulted from a sharing in names and expressions, then they themselves have surely assimilated God to man, since they have predicated of Him such attributes as hearing *(al-sam')*, sight *(al-basar)*, knowledge *(al-'ilm)*, power *(al-qudra)*, will *(al-irada)* and life *(al-hayat)*, in spite of the sharing of humans in the expressions denoting these attributes. God has ninety-nine names among which there are but two, "Allah" and "al-Rahman," which could not be applied to any other than Himself; all the rest, however, can be so applied without constituting *tashbih* or *tajsim*-anthropomorphism.

71. Furthermore, how do they intend to deal with the Quranic verses which have been revealed concerning the divine attributes? Do they have any means of rejecting them? or a way of nullifying them? or will they affirm them in spite of what they claim to constitute *tashbih*-anthropomorphism? But they already know—God willing—that there is no *tashbih*-anthropomorphism in any of this; still, they forge lies and they are not ashamed.—May God banish them from all that is good! Now if it be that God has indeed blinded their minds so that they supposed this, it would not be too farfetched. For we have seen those who have ascribed to us the words of God and those of His Apostle, by way of blaming us for them as their authors, saying: "You say **'The Merciful rose over the throne;'**[20:5] you say, **'God spoke directly to Moses;'**[4:164] and you say,

[53] *Batiniyya*, or Esoterics is a name given to the Isma'ili Shi'as in medieval times, referring to their stress on the *batin*, the "inward" meaning behind the literal wording of sacred texts. It is also used as a derogatory description for anyone accused of rejecting the literal meaning of such texts in favour of the *batin*.

‘God descends each night to the heaven closest to the earth’[54] ”. But these are the words of God, which **“Falsehood comes not to it from any side. It is a revelation from One wise and praiseworthy.”**[41:42] And they are also the words of His Apostle. They were induced by their partisanship and blindness of mind to considering them as our own words, then they blamed us for them. But he who finds fault with the Book of God and the Sunna of His Apostle is not a Muslim; and he who attributes the words of God to any other than Himself is ignorant and stupid.

72. I once heard one of our companions say: “I have heard some people say: ‘The Hanbalis say: **“The Merciful rose over the throne”**[20:5].’ He continued: “So I said to them: ‘O people, fear God! You are ascribing to the Hanbalis that for which they are not fit, and to which they shall never attain. These are the words of God: **“If men and jinn assembled to produce the like of this Quran, they could not produce the like of it, though the one should help the other!”**[17:88] But you have made them to be those of the Hanbalis, raising their dignity to such an extent as to make them worthy of them. Now, *tashbih* and *tajsim*-anthropomorphism result only from him who makes the attributes of God accord in meaning with the attributes of created beings. But we do not believe this, nor do we follow it as our religion; on the contrary, we know that so far as God is concerned, **“There is nothing anything like Him. He is the Hearing, the Seeing,”**[42:11] and we know that His attributes do not resemble those of created beings. All that which occurs in the mind or the imagination, God is different therefrom. He has neither a match, nor an equal, nor a similar, nor an auxiliary; **“There is nothing anything like Him. He is the Hearing, the Seeing.”** [42:11]

73. As for our belief in the Quranic verses and the traditions treating of the divine attributes, it is purely a belief in the expressions themselves,[55] the soundness of which may not be doubted, nor their veracity suspected. Their Author knows best their intended sense; so we believe in them according to the meaning intended by our Lord. Thus we combine faith, which is obligatory, with the rejection of *tashbih*-anthropomorphism, which is prohibited. This is a more true and a more worthy doctrine than the doctrine of him who considers the Quranic verses and the traditions as *tajsim*- and *tashbih*-anthropomorphism, and contrives artfully to nullify and refute them by making them accord in meaning with the meaning intended by the attributes of created beings, through the badness of his private opinion and the evilness of his creed—We seek protection by God from far-reaching error!

[Meanings of attributes]

74. He says to us: “Speak up and tell us what appears to you to be the meaning of these expressions revealed in connection with the divine attributes!” Now this

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[54] Al-Bukhari and Muslim.
[55] See footnote #44

fellow was indeed hasty in feigning ignorance and blindness of mind, as though he really were not familiar with the creed of the people of the Sunna and their doctrines concerning these expressions. These doctrines are also his, since he had been brought up among the adherents to these expressions, and knew their teachings with regard to them.

75. Many a time did he himself expound the doctrine of the people of the Sunna with regard to this question, and make clear the truth with regard to it after he had retracted the present discourse; and many a time did he himself show that if anyone should ask us about the intended meaning of expressions regarding the divine attributes, our answer should be: "We have nothing to offer you by way of an addition to these expressions which would convey a meaning; nay rather their very recitation is their interpretation, without any meaning or interpretation in particular. But we do know that they have a meaning, among others, which is known by Him who uttered them. So we believe in them according to that meaning." Now, how can he, whose position is such, ask about the meaning of something, when he himself says, "I do not know it"? And how can he ask about the nature of what he himself thinks to be a heretical innovation to ask about, a transgression to discuss its interpretation, meddlesomeness and heretical exaggeration to examine? Has he not heard the story of Malik b. Anas when he was asked with regard to the Quranic verse **"The Merciful rose over the throne,"**[20:5] " "how 'rise over'?" Malik inclined his head and was silent until the sweat of fever covered his brow; then he looked up and said: "The attribute 'rising over' *(istawa)* is not unknown, the modality *(kayf)* of it is not comprehendible; but belief in it is obligatory, and inquiring about it is a heretical innovation." Then he gave instructions, and the man was shown the way out.[56]

[Equal treatment of heretical adversaries and companions]

76. As for his statement, "you have accused your adversaries of heretical innovation with regard to these principles, but made it allowable for your companions to have different views with regard to them," it is falsehood and calumny. We do not permit anyone to oppose the Sunna, no matter who he may be; and if he be one of our companions, we are more severe in our reproval of him than would be the case with another. The proof of this is that you are ascribed to our companions, and our Imam. Now when the present doctrines proceeded from you, we accused you of heretical innovation. Our companions abandoned you, and made lawful the shedding of your blood. Were it not for your retractation and reversion, we would certainly have been more severe with you, and held you

[56] This statement of Imam Malik has been whole-heartedly accepted by the Sunni community throughout Islamic history, and has become one of the symbols distinguishing traditionalism from rationalism. Imam Malik's position affirming the knowledge of 'rising over' (istiwa), while relegating the knowledge of modality thereof to God, has been reported by at least six of Malik's students. Those who narrated this tradition include al-Bayhaqi in *al-asma wal-sifat*, al-Dhahabi in *al-'uluw* who says: 'this is correctly attributed to Malik', and Shams al-Din Ibn 'Abd al-Hadi in his work *al-istiwa* who says: 'It is correctly attributed to Malik.' For a detailed study of Malik's tradition refer to *al-jami' lil-buhuth wal-rasa'il* by 'Abd al-Razzaq b. 'Abd al-Muhsin al-Badr p. 61-192)

further away from us. We do not accuse anyone of heretical innovation except him whom the Sunna has so accused; nor do we say anything on our own authority. But the Prophet has said: “Every innovation is a heretical innovation, and every heretical innovation is an error.”[57] Therefore, he who introduces innovations into the religion contrary to that which has come to us on the authority of the Prophet, differs from his Companions, deserts the religious doctrines of the Imams and jurisprudents, reverts to the doctrine of the speculative theologians, and urges opposition to the Sunna, is indeed guilty of having perpetrated heretical innovations. God is his reckoner and punisher; if He so wills, He will turn towards him in forgiveness; then again, if He so wills, He will cause him to go astray. And the saying of God, **“I will assuredly fill Hell with jinn and men together,”**[11:119] becomes necessitated, as suitable to the requirements of justice, to take effect upon him. God does what he wills.

[God speaks with a voice]

77. As far his doctrine with regard to the disputed question of the Quran, its discussions may be dealt with in two sections. The first one treats of the divine voice which he began by denying. Our answer to this denial is as follows: It has been established that Moses heard the words of God from God Himself without any intermediary. Indeed, if he had heard it from a tree or a stone or an angel, then the Israelites would have been superior to him in this regard; for they had heard it from Moses, the Prophet of God, and Moses is superior to the tree and the stone. Why then was Moses given the epithet of “he who is spoken to by God”? And why did God say: **“O Moses! I have chosen thee above the people with My messages and My speaking to thee”**[7:144]? and again: **“When he came to it, he was called to: ‘Moses! I am thy Lord.”**[20:11] Now no one would say this to him except God.

78. Since this is certain, then the divine voice is that which was heard, and of which the audibility is feasible. Furthermore, reference to the divine voice has been explicitly made in the traditions which have come to us. ‘Abd Allah, son of the Imam Ahmad, has said: “I once said to my father: ‘Father, the Jahmiyya claim that God does not speak by uttering a voice.’ He replied: ‘They lie; they simply occupy themselves with the science of divesting God of His attributes.’ Then he said: ‘I heard ‘Abd ar-Rahman b. Muhammad al-Muharibi, who had it on the authority of Sulayman b. Mihran al-A’mash, on the authority of Abu al-Duha, on the authority of Masruq, on the authority of ‘Abd Allah, say: ‘When God gives utterance to revelation, the people of heaven hear His voice.’ ”[58] al-Sijzi has said:

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[57] Sahih. Refer to fn. 28

[58] ‘Abdullah b. Ahmad, Kitab al-Sunnah 1/281 onwards, ed. Dr. Muhammad b. Sa’id al-Qahtani, al-Ramadi li al-Nashr 1996, albeit with slightly different wording, perhaps, due to the difference in manuscripts.

Although, the report of ‘Abd Allah b. Mas’ud is authentic, those who negate God’s voice bring forth two arguments to discredit the report:
1) They doubt the attribution of Kitab al-Sunnah to ‘Abdullah b. Ahmad, and;
2) Declare ‘Abdullah b. Mas’ud’s report to be weak on account of:

Among the relators of this tradition there is not a single Imam who is not approved; and it has been related with a chain of transmitters going back to the Apostle of God.

79. In the tradition transmitted by ‘Abd Allah b. Unays, it is related that God will call to the people on the Day of Resurrection with a voice which will be heard by him who is far as well as by him who is near: “I am the King! I am the

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i) Tadlis of ‘Abd al-Rahman b. Muhammd b. Zayd al-Muharibi, and;
ii) Tadlis of al-A’mash

In response to the first argument; many notable scholars have confirmed that Kitab al-Sunnah is correctly attributed to ‘Abdullah b. al-Imam Ahmad. These scholars include:

1) Ibn Abi Ya’la
2) al-Lalika’i
3) al-Bayhaqi
4) Ibn al-Jawzi
5) Ibn Taymiyya
6) Ibn al-Qayyim
7) Ibn Abil-‘Izz al-Hanafi
8) al-Dhahabi
9) al-Kattani

Al-Kawthari also confirms that the work is correctly attributed to ‘Abdullah, as he says: “He casts doubts on the ascription of Kitab al-Sunnah to ‘Abdullah b. Ahmad – only if that was the case – yet, we say with all regrets, this is not a matter of scepticism. For the texts quoted from this book, the Hanbali works are crammed full of, with respect to Allah’s Highness, limit, contact, etc. Nor are the manuscripts of this book rare” – to his words – “We see the *ustaadh*, zealous over the reputation of ‘Abdullah b. al-Imam Ahmad alone, without moving his little finger in censure of such pagan views narrated from him, while Allah’s religion is more deserving to be shown zealousness for”. (Maqalat 251-2)

In response to the second argument, which weakens Ibn Mas’ud’s narration, the following could be said:

Firstly, ‘Abd al-Rahman b. Muhammad b. Ziyad al-Muharibi is declared to be trustworthy *(thiqa)* by Ibn Ma’in, al-Nasa’i, al-Bazzar, al-Darqutni, Ibn Shahin, Ibn Hibban, al-Dhahabi and Abu Hatim (who declares him Saduq when narrating from thiqat).

Secondly, the accusation of *tadlis* against him is narrated from Imam Ahmad alone and no one else. Even Imam Ahmad did not say he is a *mudallis*, rather he said: wa balaghana – meaning: it has reached us that he was a mudallis, because he did not narrate from Ma’mar. Hence, he doubted his narrations from Ma’mar specifically, and not that he considered him full-fledge *mudallis*. In fact, al-Arna’ut says in his Tahrir that Imam Ahmad was alone on suggesting that he narrated from Ma’mar. For al-Mizzi does not even mention that al-Muharibi ever narrated from Ma’mar, and therefore the accusation of *tadlees* is completely rendered false. This is also the conclusion of Shu’ayb al-Arna’ut in Tahrir.

Thirdly, with respect to *tadlis* of al-A’mash, then the argument is of no use because a) al-A’mash explicitly states he heard the narration from Muslim as found in Khalq Af’al al-‘Ibad of al-Bukhari, and b) al-A’mash narrates a similar version via Shu’ba and explicitly states: I heard it from Abu al-Dhuha; and c) al-A’mash has been followed up by Abu Mansur who also narrates from Abu al-Dhuha.

The conclusion is that ‘Abdullah’s report as mentioned in Kitab al-Sunnah is authentic, all the way up to Ibn Mas’ud.

Requiter!"[59] This is a well-known tradition. It is also related in the traditions that Moses, when called to by his Lord, "O Moses!" answered quickly, rejoicing in the divine voice, and saying: "At Thy service! At Thy service! Where art Thou? I hear Thy voice, but I see not where Thou art." God replied: "O Moses! I am above thee, and to thy right, and to thy left, and to the front of thee and to the back of thee." Then, knowing that this attribute cannot belong except to God, he answered: "So art Thou, O my Lord!" [60] It is also related that Moses, upon hearing thereafter the words of humans, loathed them, so great was the impression remaining in his ears at hearing the words of God.

80. His statement that "the divine voice is a burst or a crack in the air," is sheer raving, and an empty assertion, the soundness of which is not attested by any prophetic tradition: nor has he any tradition from the Companions concerning it; nor has he furnished an argument for it; nor is he on the right track with regard to it. Suppose now that he were to be told, "we do not concede that it is so," what then would his argument be? Were he to say, "this is the terminology of us speculative theologians," we would reply: "This is very far from what is right and much closer to what is wrong. For you people have cast away the Book and the Sunna, and have become aloof from God and His Apostle; you are in nowise assisted by God towards the right, nor directed towards the truth; what you say is not accepted, nor is your terminology heeded." Should he then say, "this is a definition, and definitions cannot be denied," we would answer: "Why not? Have you ever heard of an assertion which constrains the adversary's submission to the bare mention of it, without manifestation of its soundness, or furnishing evidence in its support?" Should he reply, "it is impossible to furnish evidence in support of it," our retort would be: "This, then, is an admission of inability to furnish its proof, and of ignorance of its soundness. If you do not know its proof, by what means then did you recognize its soundness?" He who admits ignorance of the soundness of what he says, spares others the trouble of determining it, and admits to them his ignorance and the falsity of his assertion. Now how can an assertion be referred to which cannot he known to be sound or false? How will his adversary submit to him regarding that in which he admits blindness of mind and ignorance?

81. It is strange that these speculative theologians—may God blind their faculties of understanding more so than He has already done —claim that they are not satisfied except by decisive proofs and convincing arguments, and judge that the traditions—which they assert to be traditions transmitted by a single traditionist *(akhbar ahad)*—do not convey certain knowledge; then they adduce arguments such as this which does not prove anything at all, neither manifestly nor by way of certainty. On the contrary, it is but sheer blindness and raving which he fabricates from his own mind and brings forth from the scum of his stomach.

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[59] Al-Bukhari

[60] This is a small selection from a long report of Wahb b. Munabbih, collected by Imam Ahmad in his work *al-zuhd* (Dar al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya p. 54). Wahb b. Munabbih is known for narrating Israeli reports. Those of the Israeli reports that concur with the Shari'a are accepted, while those that contradict are to be rejected. Those of the reports that neither concur nor contradict the Shari'a are neither to be accepted nor rejected.

When he is denied it and asked to prove its soundness, he has nothing with which to prove it except, “we have already adopted as a rule that definitions cannot be denied.” Now do you think that since God has blinded their eyes and the perceptive faculties of their mind, that they suppose we will accept from them their bare assertion and follow them in their blindness? Their case is simply that of a blind man who is urinating on a roof, facing the people with his pudendum, and supposing that no one sees him, since he himself is incapable of seeing his own person.

82. We say further: On the contrary, the voice is that of which the audibility is feasible. This is the sound definition attested by experience. For the voice has always been qualified by audibility; and the relation of audibility to the voice is the same as that of visibility to things visible. Moreover, the adjoining of the voice to God has been firmly established by sound prophetic tradition, and the Prophet knows more about God and is more truthful than the speculative theologians who have neither knowledge, nor religion, nor the blessings of the present world nor of the world to come. They are simply the worst of mankind, of whom *zandaqa* is the predominant quality. God has inspired the hearts of his servants with repugnance towards them, rendering them an object of hatred to them.

83. Moreover, even if it should be established with certainty that the voice, in the case of things perceived by the senses, be the result of the clicking movements of the throat, why should it be thus in the case of the attributes of God? Their assertion is: “That which can be established with certainty with regard to ourselves, can be established in like manner with regard to that which is absent *(al-gha'ib)*” And our answer is: “You are wrong for three reasons.”

84. First: Your calling of God by the name of Absent *(al-gha'ib)*, though the names of God and His attributes are only known by means of the Law. But you—may God remove you far from prosperity! —could not find for God a single name, among ninety-nine names, with which you could call Him, so that you had to invent a name for Him on your own authority! Besides, God has denied this attribute of Himself for He has said:
“...and We were not *absent (gha’ibin)*”[7:7]

85. Second: You have reverted to *tashbih*-anthropomorphism, the rejection of which is your main support in refuting the Book of God and the Sunna of His Apostle; and you have caused God to follow the analogy of His servants, and be comparable to them in His attributes and names. Now this is the very essence of *tashbih*-anthropomorphism!—May God curse you!

86. Third: This anthropomorphism is false as regards the rest of the attributes of God which you have conceded, namely, hearing, sight, knowledge and life. These attributes cannot exist in our case except in consequence of certain instruments. Thus hearing exists because of a perforation; sight, because of an iris; knowledge, because of a mind; and life exists in a body. Moreover, all of the attributes cannot exist except in a body; therefore, if you say that it is the same in the case of the

Creator, you are guilty of *tajsim* and *tashbih*-anthropomorphism, and have become unbelievers. On the other hand, if you should say, the divine attributes do not require a body," then why were they required in the present case?

87. However, that which has been firmly established by the Book and the Sunna cannot be put aside by the sheer raving of your spokesman, nor shall we desert the doctrines of the Apostle of God for those of a meddlesome heretical innovator. We will not accept their doctrines in matters which find no support in revealed scripture or in prophetic tradition. In our eyes, they have neither honour nor dignity. How are we to consent to the nullification of the Book and the refutation of the Sunna despite our clinging to them, our adhering to them, our holding fast to them, and the eagerness of our desire for them, in the manner of him who is persuaded that salvation consists in adhering to them, perdition in abandoning them, transgression and the lack of divine preservation in opposing them?—We beseech God to grant us that we keep steadfastly to them during our life, and after our death, until the day when we shall meet Him, so that He may recompense us for our steadfastness and place us in the company of the Prophet who announced them.

88. He argues falsely when he asserts that the following statement constitutes *tashbih*-anthropomorphism; namely, that when God speaks, there is a sound in the heavens "similar to the sound which results from dragging a chain on smooth rocks."[61] Such an assertion constitutes an objection against the Master of

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[61] Sahih mawquf tradition up to Ibn Mas'ud, however, since he could not have acquired the knowledge of this nature except via the Prophet – peace and blessings be upon him – it dictates that the information contained in the authentic text must be from the Prophet, rendering the tradition to be marfu' in meaning. The authentic mawquf version was collected by Ibn Khuzayma, al-Darimi in his *al-radd 'ala al-jahmiyya* and others.

Those who deny that God speaks with a voice argued that the sound "similar to the sound which results from dragging a chain on smooth rocks", as mentioned in the text refers to the angels flattering their wings, and not God's voice.

However, their argument is false due to three reasons:

Firstly: The default in the Arabic language is that a pronoun in (ka anna**hu**) refers to the immediate object and not the furthest. Hence, in the sentence: "the angels flutter their wings indicating complete surrender to His saying which sounds like chains being dragged on rock"; the phrase "which sounds like" refers to "His saying", and not the angels fluttering their wings.

Secondly: The pronoun mentioned in the text is masculine (ka anna**hu**) because it refers to 'God's saying' (qawli**hi**) which is also masculine. If the pronoun was referring to the wings of the angels (al-ajniha) then it would have been a feminine pronoun (ka anna**ha**), since al-ajniha is also feminine.

Thirdly: What renders their interpretation false is the narration collected by Ibn Jarir with an authentic chain, containing trustworthy narrators throughout:

Narrated to us Ahmad b. 'Abda al-Dhabi *(thiqa)* who said narrated to us Sufyan b. 'Uyayna *(Imam)*, who narrates from 'Amr b. Dinar *(Imam)* who narrates from 'Ikrima *(Imam)* who narrates from Abu Hurayrah that the Prophet – peace be upon him – said: "When God decrees some order in the heaven, the angels

Apostles, Muhammad, the truthful and trustworthy Apostle of God, as well as an accusation of *tamthil* and *tajsim*—anthropomorphism levelled against him. Whoever does this has deserted the orthodox faith. But the matter is not as this faithless forger of false accusations asserts it to be; he has but simply been deceived by the evilness of his purpose and the paucity of his understanding.

"*How many persons have censured a valid statement,*
Whose censure was the result of meagre understanding!"

Now the above comparison has nothing to do with the thing heard. It is simply the comparison of one hearing with another hearing; that is to say that our hearing of the sound of a chain over smooth rocks would be like our hearing of the divine voice. This comparison is akin to the one which the Prophet made in this other tradition: "Verily, you shall see your Lord as you see the full moon, you shall not gather together in order to see Him;"[62] that is to say that your seeing of your Lord is like your seeing of the full moon, in that the full moon is such that it can be seen by all, not by some to the exclusion of others. This now is the case of one who is about to break his fast; in order to do so, he does not need to join ranks with other fasters in order to see the full moon, as is the case in the seeing of the crescent, at which time they gather together so that he who sees it points it out to him who does not. But the seeing of the full moon is not done in this manner. For this reason, the tradition has been related with the two variants of *you will not he harmed*, from the root *DYM*, and *you will not gather together*, from the root *DMM*. Now the present case likewise involves a comparison of one hearing with another hearing, and not of one thing heard with another thing heard.

89. He who seeks the truth, God will direct him to that which is right, and wisdom and useful knowledge will accrue to him as a result of the words of God and those of His Apostle. But he who seeks other than the truth, God will cause him to be blind to the right direction, and the Quran and Sunna will then become, for him, false arguments by means of which he will go astray. God has said: **"We send down, though the Quran, that which is healing and mercy to the believers and which only adds to the perdition of the unjust."**[17:82] Similar to this is the sun's light which brightens the way for him who has good sight; but he whose sight is weak, and his eye diseased, will be increased in weak-sightedness by its light and caused to become blind. The poet has said:

Knowledge, for the sensible man, is an enhancement,
But for the weak-minded fool, a defect;
Just as daylight to the perception of mankind
Adds brightness, and blinds the eyesight of bats.

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flutter their wings altogether, and His saying has a voice which sounds like chains being dragged on al-Safa – the rocks" (li qawlihi sawtun ka sawt al-silsilat 'ala al-safwan)

[62] Al-Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Dawud and al-Tirmidhi

90. As for the details of his false arguments in speculative theology, we shall not plunge into them with him; but we know them to be false by virtue of their very source. We have already clearly shown, by what has preceded, the evilness of the science of speculative theology by virtue of its very source, the censure of it by our Imams, the universal agreement of the scholars that its advocates are partisans of heretical innovations and error, that they are not considered to belong to the ranks of scholars, that whoever occupies himself with it becomes a *zindiq* and will not prosper. Indeed, the evidence and the veracity of what the Imams say, has become manifest in the case of the author of the present discourse. His condition had gone so far into *zandaqa* and heretical innovation that he was publicly declared to have innovated and erred. The shedding of his blood was made lawful, and it was necessary for him to repent and confess against himself that he was following the path of heretical innovation and error, and that he who reproved him was right in his reprobation of him. The present discourse is part of the total sum of errors for which he repented and of heretical innovations from which he reverted.[63]

[63] The orthodox doctrine that God speaks with a voice and letters is based upon the Book, the Sunna and sound reason. There are many passages in the Quran that speak of God's 'calling out' such as the verse, **"Didn't the story of Moses reach you? When His Lord Called (idh nadahu) him at the sacred valley of Tuwa"** [al-Nazi'at 79:15-6]; and **"[Remember] when your Lord Called Moses (wa-idh nada rabbuka musa) : Go to the unjust people!"** [al-Shu'ara 26:10]

In the Arabic language, the expressions *nada*, *yunadi*, *al-nida* (calling) only refers to calling out with a loud voice. Abu Nasr al-Sijzi al-Shafi'i says: " *'al-nida'* to the Arabs refers to a voice and nothing else. Nothing has come from God or His Messenger – peace be upon him – that God calls out without a voice." (al-Sijzi, al-radd 'ala man Ankara al-harf wa al-sawt p. 166, ed. Muhammad ba Karim ba 'Abd Allah, Dar al-Raya 1994) Abu al-Wafa b. 'Aqil says: "It is known that *al-nida* is nothing but a voice..."

The Sunnah also contains many evidences proving that God speaks with a voice. One of the famous narrations in support of this is mentioned by Al-Bukhari, via 'Abdullah b. Unays, in his Sahih as *ta'liq* with *sighat al-jazm*, indicating that the narration is authentic. Al-Bukhari mentions the text of this narration in his work 'khalq af'al al-'ibad' which states: "…and then He will call them out with a voice..." al-Bukhari comments just before citing this narration: "In this there is proof that God's voice does not resemble the voice of the creation, because God's voice – may His remembrance be Exalted! – is heard from far as it is heard from near, and that the angels fall unconscious upon hearing His voice. If the angels were to call, they would not fall unconscious." (al-Bukhari, khaql af'al al-'ibad page 182, ed. 'Amr 'Abd al-Mun'im Salim, Dar Ibn al-Qayyim 2003) Ibn Hajar, in Fath al-Bari, also confirms that in al-Bukhari's opinion, God speaks with a voice, which does not resemble the voices of the creation.

The mu'allaq narration in al-Bukhari via 'Abdullah b. Unays has been authenticated by al-Bukhari, al-Hakim, al-Dhahabi, Ibn Hajar, al-Albani and Shu'ayb al-Arna'ut. Shaykh Muhammad Nasir al-Din al-Albani, in his verification of Kitab al-Sunnah by Ibn Abi 'Asim [p. 225-6, published in 1426/2005 by Zuhayr Shawish], writes:

"Hadith is Sahih, while its chain is hasan or close, for Ibn 'Aqil is hasan al-hadith. However, al-Qasim b. Abd al-Wahid – who is Ayman al-Makki – none declared him trustworthy (thiqa) except Ibn Hibban. Abu Hatim says of him: 'His narrations are to be noted down (i.e. for *i'tibar*).' He was then asked: 'Are his narrations used as independent proofs (yuhtaj bih)?' He said: Narrations of Sufyan and Shu'ba are to be used as independent proofs.'

Al-Dhahabi said of him in al-Mizan: 'He is declared trustworthy.' " – to his words – "The hadith has been narrated by al-Bukhari in al-Adab al-Mufrad (970), Af'al al-'Ibad (p.89), al-Hakim (4/574), and from him

[God speaks with letters]

91. Now for the affirmation of the letters of the Quran. The Quran is this Arabic Book which was revealed to Muhammad, consisting of Suras, verses, letters and words. Whoever reads it clearly in Arabic, will receive for each of its letters a tenfold blessing. Whoever admits this and teaches it, concedes the existence of the letters. There is no reason after this to deny the letters or to say them incoherently. Whoever denies them, will be refuted by more than one hundred verses contained in the Quran. The consensus of the Muslims will pronounce him a liar, and the Sunna of the Apostle of God, and the teachings of his Companions and Successors, will declare him an unbeliever.

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al-Bayhaqi in al-Asma' (p.78-79), and Ahmad (3/495) from a different route via Hammam b. Yahya from him.

Al-Hakim said: Sahih al-isnad! Furthermore, al-Dhahabi agreed!!! This is what they said, however, in the best of cases the hadeeth is hasan as we mentioned.

al-Bukhari (in his Sahih) mentioned this hadeeth as ta'liq (without mentioning the chain) as sighat al-jazm (indicating the authenticity of the tradition).

Al-Hafidh said (1/159): "This is because its chain is hasan, for it has been supported [by other narrations]" He also said: "The narration also has a different route, as collected by al-Tabarani in Musnad al-Shamiyyin and his Tamam fi Fawa'id via al-Hajjaj b. Dinar, 'an Muhammad b. al-Munkadir, 'an Jabir… he then mentioned the same narration. Its chain is good *(salih)*. It also has a third route collected by al-Khatib in al-Rihla via Abu al-Jarud al-'Ansi,'an Jabir, with the same narration, although there is weakness in its chain."

Al-Hadith al-Mundhiri (4/202) says about the narration: "Ahmad narrated it with a hasan chain."

From this *takhrij* it becomes obvious to anyone with acute perception that the narration is sahih with the three routes combined. Shaykh Zahid a-Kawthari presumptuously assumed in his notes on al-Asma' [wa'l-Sifat by al-Bayhaqi] that the narration has no route but the first. He, therefore, criticised the narration, relying on the aforementioned statement of Abu Hatim with respect to al-Qasim, and the fact that al-Bukhari and Muslim did not narrate anything from Ibn 'Aqil! This is only a demonstration of his bigotry against traditions and its people, for which he is known. He, in fact, filled his comments with the like. Otherwise, why did he ignore the two routes which we mentioned from al-Fath [of Ibn Hajar], especially if one of them has a good chain *(salih al-isnad)*?! May Allah protect us from madhabist bigotry."

Shu'ayb al-Arna'ut also declares this narration to be Hasan in his verification of Musnad of Imam Ahmad (25/432) and further says: "As for 'Abdullah b. Muhammad b. 'Aqil, al-Hafidh [Ibn Hajar] says in al-Talkhis: 'if he is a lone narrator of a text, then that is to be declared *hasan*. But if he is opposed then his narration is not accepted.' Al-Dhahabi says in al-Mizan: 'His Hadeeth is in the category of Hasan'. We say (i.e. al-Arna'ut): He narration has been followed up by another narrator, and the rest of the narrators in the chain are trustworthy (thiqat) from the narrators of the two Shaykhs (al-Bukhari and Muslim)."

The well-known narration of of Ibn Mas'ud has been mentioned and discussed in fn 58 and 61. Perhaps, a separate treatise can be written and dedicated to the topic of God's speech with a voice and letters. For further reading, refer to al-Radd 'ala man Ankara al-Harf wal-Sawt by Abu Nasr al-Sijzi (d. 444); Mas'ala fi al-Harf wal-Sawt by Abu'l-Wafa b. 'Aqil (refer to fn 10); al-Munadhara fi al-Quran by Ibn Qudamah al-Maqdisi; Juz' fi al-Huruf wa al-Aswat by Abu Zakariyya al-Nawawi; and of course, several works by Ibn Taymiyyah.

92. How many verses are there in the Quran in which God says that **"this is the Quran"**[64]? Now the word "this" designates something actual. And how many verses as follows: **"We have presented to men, in this Qur'an,"**[17:89] **"We have set before men, in this Quran"**[30:58]? How many verses does the Quran contain in which God describes the Quran as being Arabic?[65] And how many verses wherein He defied them to produce the like of this Quran or a single Sura like it? How many times are verses, Suras and words ascribed to the Quran? Indeed, God has threatened that He would cast into hellfire him who says, **"this is the word of a mortal."** [74:25-26] And He has refuted him who says that it is poetry, by saying: **"We have not taught him poetry, nor would it beseem him. It is only a Reminder and a Clear Quran."**[36:69]

93. It is a known fact that poetry consists only of measured speech; therefore it is not permissible to ascribe it except to measured speech, having letters and words. Now God has denied of the Quran its being poetry and declared it to be a recitation." Examples similar to this one - are numerous. What then is the purpose of his denying the letters after this, despite the fact that the Prophet did speak of the expression "letters" in his traditions? This expression has also been frequently transmitted on the authority of his Companions, and on the authority of those who succeeded them. People are in general agreement as to the counting of the letters of the Quran, its verses, and its words; they are generally agreed that he who denies a single letter of the Quran which has been agreed upon is an unbeliever. Persistence in denying it after this is nothing hut stubborn opposition.

[Practise what you preach!]

94. As for his statement, "God! Fear God! with regard to such boldness! keep to the path which was followed by the pious *Salaf*, and abstain from plunging into a discussion
of God by making use of what is neither provided for by the Law nor in conformity with reason"—we answer it as follows: "We have already been doing this—through God's grace and kindness—without the help of his admonition; and we have been accepting what our *Salaf* have followed without the help of his counsel. Also, we have abandoned those who have abandoned them, and refuted those who have opposed them; and along with this, we have rejected his doctrine and made a clear exposition of his scandal. But as for Ibn 'Aqil himself, he is, by virtue of this statement, ordering the good, but forgetting himself, and prohibiting evil, but turning to that which he has prohibited. Now this practice is held in abhorrence by God; He has said: **"It is very abhorrent to God that you should say that which you do not do."**[61:3] God has also reproached

[64] There are in total seven verses in which God says: **'This is the Quran'**; i) al-Naml 27:76; ii) al-Rum 30:58; iii) Saba 34:31; iv) al-Zumar 39:27; v) Fussilat 41:26; vi) al-Zukhruf 43: 31; vii) al-Hashr 59:21

[65] There are altogether eight verses in which God describes the Quran as being Arabic; i) Yusuf 12:2; ii) al-Ra'd 13:37; iii) Taha 20:113; iv) al-Zumar 39:28; v) Fussilat 41:3; vi) al-Shura 42:7; vii) al-Zukhruf 43:3; viii) al-Ahqaf 46:12

the Jews by saying: **"Will you enjoin men to right conduct and forget yourselves?"**[2:44]

95. A tradition was related to us that the Prophet said: "On the Day of Resurrection, a man will be brought and thrown into the fire, and the intestines of his belly will spill forth, and he will revolve therein as the donkey revolves around his mill-stones; then someone who was acquainted with him on earth will look upon him from above, and say: 'O So-and-so! What is the meaning of this? It is with you we were, learning from you!' And he will reply: 'Indeed, I used to enjoin you to do something, while I myself avoided it; and admonish you to abandon something, while I myself committed it';" —or words according to the letter of the tradition.[66]

96. God has revealed the statement of Shu'aib: **"I do not wish that in opposition to you I should betake myself to that which I forbid you."**[11:88] The poets have also had their say against this practice, among which that of Abu al-Aswad:

O you who would teach others,
Why not address that teaching to yourself?
Think you of fecundating our minds with orthodoxy
While you are in lack of it yourself?
Prohibit not a bad habit, then perpetrate one like it,
A great disgrace will befall you when you do.
With your own soul begin and restrain it from its error;
Then will you become wise, when your own soul abstains.
Then will it be good for you to preach and your word
Will be followed, and your teaching will be of use.

And Abu al-'Atahiya said:

O you who admonish people, you have become accused,
Since you blame them for things you yourself perpetrate.
Like him who is clothed to cover his nudity, while his pudendum
Remains visible to people, and he does not cover it.
The greatest of sins, after Shirk, you know it to be,
In each soul, its blindness to its own vices—
Its knowledge of the sins of people which it readily sees issuing
From them, but sees not the vice within itself enclosed.

And he has also said:
You so describe virtue that you seem to possess it,
While the stench of sins diffuses from your clothes!

[66] Al-Bukhari and Muslim

97. Therefore, this discourse which he has called "a good counsel" is nothing but an injunction to plunge, in ignorance, into a discussion of God, a rejection of the traditions of the Prophet, and a prohibition against being satisfied with the teachings of the *Salaf*. Though he has returned to God in penitence for it and renounced it, its grievous sin does not cease to unite itself to him; so also becomes attached to him the grievous sin of him who has gone astray because of it and become deceived by his having written it. For he who institutes an evil rule of conduct, bears its burden as well as the burden of him who acts according to it, until the Day of Resurrection.

98. But it is my hope that this treatise will be the most important factor in the procurement of blessings upon him and benefits to him, considering that it will keep people from falling into error by following his teachings. Thus will be separated from him the grievous sin resulting from the fact that contact with his teachings was exposing people to the danger of falling into error by means of them. I beseech God to forgive us and to forgive him, for he did indeed retract these doctrines. Also, he has said much, and has written excellent books, on the subject of orthodoxy. If only he had erased this heretical innovation from his book, he would have been relieved of the grievous sin attached to it and delivered others from being calumniated by it. But God does as He pleases. Still, we have given an account on his authority regarding its nullification and a clear exposition of its nature, in order that the deception of those who have been deceived by it may cease to exist.

99. We intercede with God to forgive him and us, and to accept his repentance and that of all penitents. We beseech Him to keep us steadfast in the path of His religion and the Sunna of His Prophet, to guide us rightly that we may follow our pious *Salaf* as our guides and adhere to their course, and to place us in their company on the Day of Resurrection, **"with the Prophets, the Truthful Ones, the Martyrs and the Righteous upon whom God has bestowed favour,"**[4:69] by virtue of His mercy and generosity.

[Author's counsel]

100. I bid you, my brothers—may God guide you rightly!— to adhere to the Book of your Lord and to the Sunna of your Prophet, to hold fast thereto, and to avoid all innovations, For every innovation is a heretical innovation, and every heretical innovation is an error. Do not allow yourselves to be deceived by the discourse of a person who will turn you away from the orthodox path which you have been following, no matter who he may be. For he is incapable of adding anything to that which has been said by your Prophet, or by his worthy Companions or by your Imam—Imam of the Sunna by universal agreement— Abu 'Abd Allah Abmad b. Muhammad b. Hanbal, or by the Imams who were his contemporaries or his predecessors. You have already heard, and we have already mentioned to you, some of the doctrines which they followed and some of their counsels; do not deviate therefrom through the doctrine of someone, though you may think him to be a great Imam. For it has been related that Mu'adh b. Jabal said: "[I warn you

against] the deviation of the sage."[67] 'Umar has said: "Three things are detrimental to religion: the slip of a learned man, the disputation of a hypocrite who uses the Quran, and Imams who cause others to go astray."[68] It is related that the Prophet said: "I fear for my community three things: I fear for them the slip of a learned man, the judgment of a despot, and a pursued heresy."[69] And again he said: "I have left with you two things; so long as you cling to them, you will never err: the Book of God and the Sunna of His Apostle."[70]

101. God has given you a lesson in this man, whom you believed to possess a wealth of religious knowledge, by showing you how he has committed his foul sin; so do not allow yourselves to be deceived by anyone. Moreover, take care not to enter into discussions treating of innovated questions which have not been the subject of some past tradition, or treated by an approved Imam; for they are innovated heresies; and your Prophet has warned you against innovations, by saying: "Beware of innovated things, for every innovation is a heretical innovation and every heretical innovation is an error."[71] And again: "The most evil of things are the innovated ones."[72] Such are, for instance, the question of diacritical points and vocalization; the question of the eternal punishment of the partisans of heretical innovation in hell-fire; and other innovations and stupidities such as these, concerning which there is no tradition so that it may be followed, nor a statement from an approved Imam so that it may be hearkened to. Plunging into a discussion of it is a dishonour; whereas silence about it is an honour. He who speaks about it is a heretic, plunging into heretical innovation, and guilty of the most evil of things, by virtue of the testimony of established tradition. And God will be asking him who has discussed it to give an account of his discussion, and He will demand of him his argument and his evidence.

102. Sahl b. Abd Allah al-Tustari said: "No one has ever innovated a thing in matters of religious knowledge, but that he is questioned about it on the Day of Resurrection; should he conform to the Sunna, well and good; otherwise, he shall perish." But he who holds his tongue from these stupidities shall not be questioned about them; and he has an excellent example to follow in the Apostle of God, his Companions and their Successors. We are more learned in the traditions than you are, and more tenacious in our search for them; and we have contented ourselves with following the path of our *Salaf* and avoiding the innovations which came after them. Will you not therefore content yourselves with this? Is not that which was fit for them, fit for us? Have we not in the Sunna ample scope to avoid heretical innovation?

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[67] Collected by al-Hakim who declared it Sahih, al-Tabarani in Mu'jam al-Kabir and Ibn 'Asakir in Tarikh Madinat Dimashq

[68] Al-Darimi

[69] Dha'if, collected by al-Tabarani in Mu'jam al-Kabir and al-Daylami in al-Firdaws.

[70] Hasan, mentioned by Malik in al-Muwatta as mu'dhal, however, it is strengthened by a similar tradition related by Ibn 'Abbas and collected by al-Hakim.

[71] Sahih. See footnote #28

[72] Ibid.

103. He who does not find fit what proved to be fit for the Prophet, for the *Salaf* and the Imams, may God not make ample his means of subsistence. He who is not contented with what they were contented with, nor pleased with what they were pleased with, nor follows their path, but weakens in spirit and censures them, belongs to the faction of Satan: **"he only invites his party that they may be among the inmates of the Blaze."**[35:6] He who is not contented with the straight path, will enter upon the path of Hell. He who travels a path other than that of his *Salaf*, will be brought thereby to his perdition. He who deviates from the Sunna is deviating from the path which leads to Paradise.

104. Therefore, fear God, and fear for your souls, for the matter is a difficult one. There is nothing outside of Paradise but hell-fire; there is nothing outside of the truth but error; and there is nothing outside of the Sunna but heretical innovation. Now you know that every innovation is a heresy; therefore, do not discuss an innovation—Peace be with you, and the mercy and blessings of God upon you! May God keep us steadfast on the path of the Sunna, and grant us refuge from heretical innovations, and the cause of temptation, by virtue of His mercy and beneficence.

105. Guard yourselves—may God be merciful to you—from obstinate dispute with regard to the Quran, and from inquiry concerning matters which God did not impose upon you as a task, and which serve no practical purpose. For it is related that the Prophet said: "Obstinate dispute with regard to the Quran is unbelief."[73] The *Salaf* have prohibited disputing about God, His attributes and His names. We have been prohibited to examine God mentally. Malik has said: "Discussion concerning religious matters, I hate; and the inhabitants of our town have not ceased to hate it. I do not approve of discussion except with regard to that which serves a practical purpose. But as for discussion concerning religious matters and God, silence is more preferable to me; because I have seen the people of our town prohibiting the discussion of religious matters, except that which serves a practical purpose."[74] Now what Malik said has been followed by the community of scholars and jurisprudents—the people of tradition and *fatwas*, both in ancient and in modern times. Only the partisans of heretical innovation have opposed this; but as for the community, it follows what Malik said.

106. If you have a desire for discussion, and the extension of the range of your knowledge, inquire into *fiqh*, its problems and its regulations; inheritance *ab intestat* and its regulations; vested inheritance; the division of the deceased's estate; the problems of acknowledgment; guardianship, which has many facets; then wills and legacies, and their regulations. After that, the problems concerned with algebra, calculus, and the mensuration of land. In all of this, you have ample scope to forego plunging into that from which you have been prohibited—matters which your *Salaf* did not discuss, which your Imam has disapproved, which will not bring you to good, and in which you cannot help but innovate a heresy in

[73] Sahih, collected by Ahmad, al-Bazzar, al-Hakim and Abu Nu'aym in al-Hilya.
[74] Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, Jami' Bayan al-'Ilm 2/938, ed. Abu al-Ashbal, Dar Ibn al-Jawzi 1998

which your Imam would be Satan. God will hate you for it; and your Prophet will declare himself free from you on account of it; and your brothers, people of the Sunna, will abandon you for your having abandoned the Sunna of your Prophet; and you will be kept back from the Pool of your Prophet, pursuant to the tradition wherein it is related that on the Day of Resurrection, people will come to the Pool, and come close to the Prophet. The Prophet has said; "I will say then, 'O my Companions! O my Companions!' And I will be told: You do not know what they innovated after you had left them!' Therefore, I will say to them, 'May God alienate you from good, and curse you!' "[75] —God grant us and you protection from this!

107. But if you adhere to the Sunna of your Prophet, accept his admonition, follow the path of your *Salaf*, and abstain from busying yourselves with that which does not concern you, you maybe assured of your safety, and rejoice at the annunciation of excellence, dignity, and eternal dwelling in the abode of everlastingness **"with the Prophets, the Truthful Ones, the Martyrs and the Righteous upon whom God has bestowed favour; good company are these!"**[4:69]—God grant us and you the right direction towards what pleases Him, by virtue of His mercy. Amen.

Praise be to God, Lord of the Worlds. The blessings of God and His salutations on our Master Muhammad, our Prophet Muhammad, the Prophet of prosperity, the leader to prosperity, and the Apostle of mercy.

[75] Al-Bukhari, Muslim and Ahmad